



SMALL UNIT ACTIONS

351st Infantry - 88th Infantry Division

SANTA MARIA INFANTE

11-14 May 1944

AMERICAN FORCES IN ACTION SERIES presents detailed accounts of particular combat operations of United States forces. To the American public, this record of high achievement by men who served their nation well is presented as a preface to the full military history of World War II. To the soldiers who took part in the operations concerned, these narratives will give the opportunity to see more clearly the results of orders which they obeyed, and of sacrifices which they and their comrades made, in performance of missions that find their meaning in the outcome of a larger plan of battle.

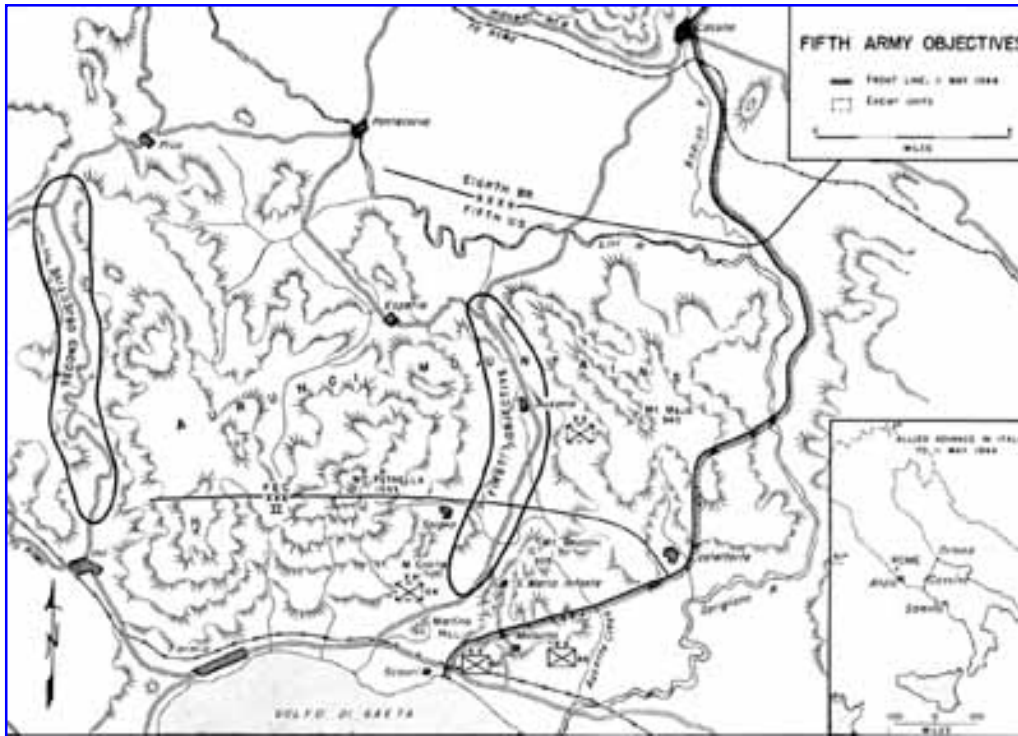
Small Unit Actions, eleventh in the series of monographs on American operations in World War II, marks a departure from earlier numbers in that series. It presents, instead of a coordinated treatment of a larger operation, four detailed narratives dealing with small units which took part in such operations. Each narrative has a unity of its own, but the actions dealt with are separate and distinct, relating to four campaigns in three main theaters of war.



TERRAIN OF FIFTH ARMY'S BATTLE, *looking north toward the Liri Valley. The importance of the Mt. Bracchi hill mass is clearly shown, in relation to the valley leading north to the Liri through Ausonia. (Photo taken April 1946.)*

The battle for Santa Maria Infante was important in the opening of the Allied offensive toward Rome on 11 May 1944. Strong Allied forces were concentrated on the west side of the Italian peninsula to renew an effort stopped by the winter and heavy German resistance. Eighth Army was poised for attack through the Liri Valley along the axis of Highway No. 6; main Fifth Army faced a chain of mountains, in a 13-mile zone from the Liri River to the sea. The forces in the Anzio Beachhead were ready to strike when their opportunity came as a result of progress on the other fronts.

Although Fifth Army's bridgehead across the Garigliano made a dangerous river crossing unnecessary, the Aurunci Mountains, fortified by positions that were part of the enemy's Gustav Line, formed a difficult barrier. On the right were the highest peaks, topped by Mount Majo (940 meters). The Ausonia Valley lying west of this group separates it from another steep mass of mountains, dominated by Mt. Petrella (1,533 meters). Lower hills fronted the army's left wing, but these were known to be heavily defended. The most important formed a triangular wedge at the southern end of the Ausonia Valley; if the Minturno ridge (in our possession) is considered as the base, the hill triangle narrows northward to the highest hill of the feature, Mt. del Bracchi (205 meters).



MAP NO. 1

To judge by the disposition of their troops, the Germans considered the higher mountains too formidable for a main attack by Fifth Army. Therefore, Fifth Army's plan was for the French Expeditionary Corps, employing highly trained mountain troops and elements of four divisions, to attack Mt. Majo, where enemy defenses were not extensive and where tactical surprise might be obtained.

Simultaneously with the French attack to the north, two fresh divisions of II Corps, the 88th and 85th, would attack the well-defended hills making up the Mt. Bracchi triangle, as well as San Martino Hill to the left of the feature and Hill 413 on the right. Capture of Mt. Bracchi in Phase I of the offensive was essential to protect the flank of French units when they crossed the Ausonia Valley after capture of Mt. Majo ([Map No. 1](#), opposite).

On II Corps' right wing, the 88th Division was to carry the main effort of the corps attack against the wedge of hills dominated by Mt. Bracchi. (See the panorama of the battlefield, page 116.) The 351st Infantry would fight the most important battle in this zone, with its main objective Santa Maria Infante, a small town near the top of the hill triangle, which would undoubtedly be tenaciously held. Santa Maria Infante commanded the main German lateral route of communications in the Ausonia Valley, and once our troops gained the town they could easily advance north to Mt. Bracchi and make untenable all the enemy's positions in the valley to the east. The 88th would be assisted on the left by the 85th Division, which was assigned a few hill objectives on the western edge of the Bracchi triangle, as well as San Martino Hill lying in the valley west of the feature. On the right of the 351st, the 350th Infantry was ordered to break resistance in the hills southwest of Castelforte.

The most difficult terrain on Fifth Army's front confronted the French forces, but the battle in the smaller hills facing II Corps could be slow and bloody. In the past campaigns, Fifth Army had often found it easier to advance in mountainous terrain, where enemy observation and fields of fire had numerous blind spots. In the lower hills, rolling countryside and even slopes afforded superb positions for German machine guns, sited to cover all avenues of approach.



MAP NO. 2

Task of the 351st Infantry

To reach its objective, Santa Maria, near the north tip of the Bracchi triangle, the 351st Infantry had to attack over difficult terrain ([Map No. 2](#), page 120 and [Map No. 3](#), page 122). From east-west Cemetery Ridge, rising above Minturno and forming the base of the triangle, a connecting ridge extends 1,950 yards north to Santa Maria and then on to the apex of the triangle at Mt. Bracchi.

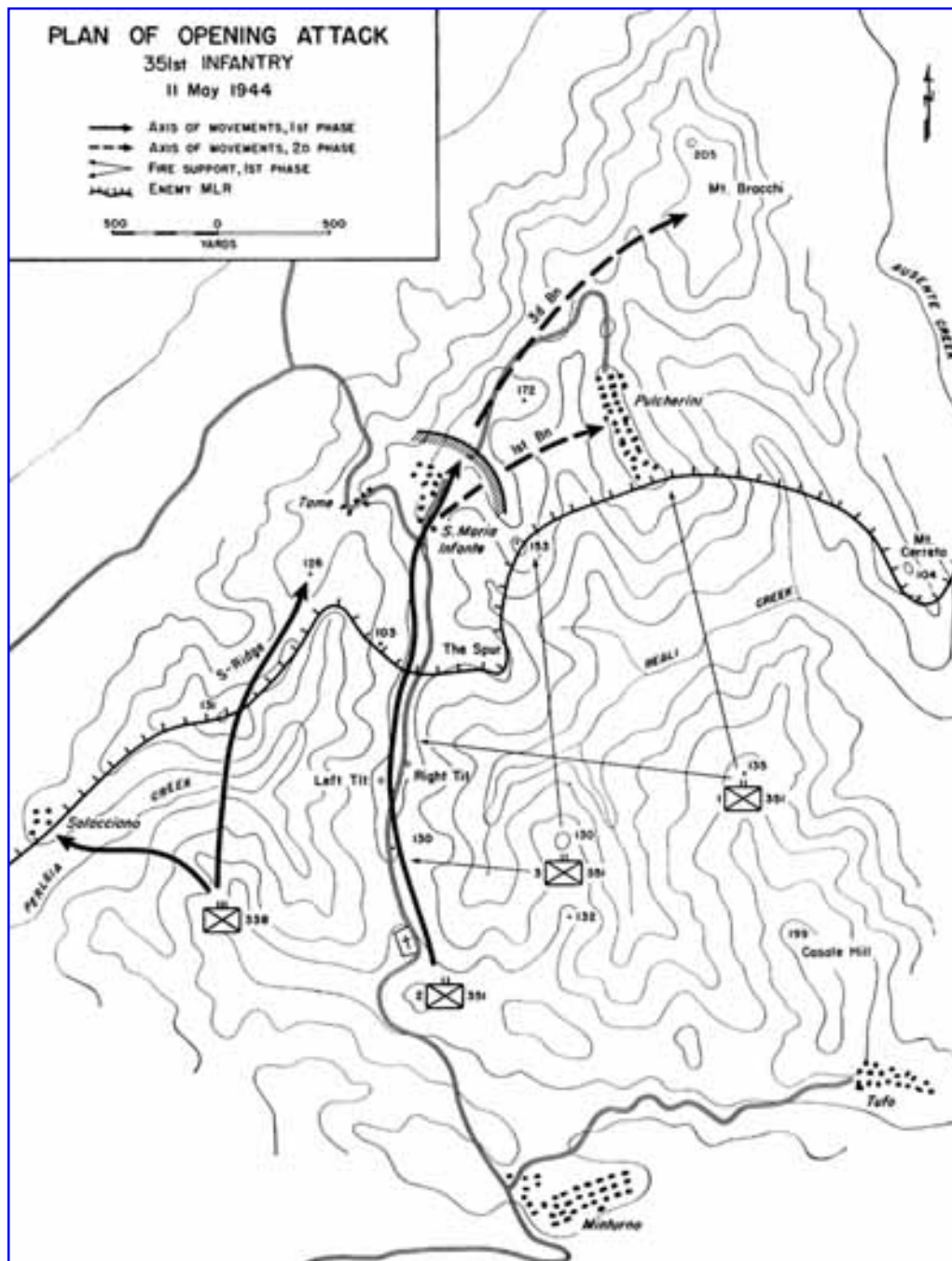
This connecting ridge, running through the whole hill mass parallel to its western edge, was to be the axis of attack for the 351st. The crest averages a little more than 125 meters and is followed by the Minturno-Santa Maria road; beyond a double curve at the Minturno cemetery the road winds along the ridge line to a fork a few yards south of Santa Maria, where one branch goes northeast through the town and then into Pulcherini, and the other runs northwest through the tiny hamlet of Tame and down the hills to a junction with the Ausonia-Formia highway.



THE OBJECTIVE OF THE 351ST INFANTRY was *Santa Maria Infante*, seen on the hill in foreground. The road from Minturno along the ridge comes in from the lower left. Beyond the immediate battleground is the valley leading (upper right) through Ausonia to the Liri Valley. The Aurunci Mountains dominate this plain.

The sides of the north-south ridge are cut by draws into small spurs, which, stubbornly held by the enemy, turned out to be the most troublesome obstacles to the 351st's advance. Six hundred and fifty yards beyond the cemetery, small knolls known as the Right and Left Tits, 150 and 146 meters high, jut out on either side of the road. Three hundred yards beyond the Right Tit the steeply sloped side-hill called The Spur extends 750 yards east from the road.

From its slightly curved crest (157 and 146 meters at the highest points) The Spur commands both the ridge road and the valley to its east. West of The Spur, Hill 103 dominates the slope on the left side of the road.





TERRAIN OF THE INITIAL ATTACK

Looking along the Santa Maria road from edge of cemetery. (Photo taken April 1946.)

East of the main ridge, Reali Creek had cut a small valley along its course east through the hill mass. North-south spurs with sharp slopes jut into this valley on both sides, and made any flanking attack toward Santa Maria more difficult than a direct approach along the road. West of the road, a much more narrow valley formed by the Perlgia Creek separates the Santa Maria ridge from the feature forming the west side of the hill triangle, the S-Ridge running northeast from Solacciano, to Tame. Its crest is marked by a series of knobs (131, 109, 126, and 128), with a long saddle separating the first two. Its steep slopes reaching a gradient of 33 percent at places, the S-Ridge was key tactical ground in the coming battle, for it commanded the main advance along the Minturno-Santa Maria road as well as the lower end of the Ausonia-Formia road. Its capture would pave the way for a breakthrough into the Formia corridor and an advance toward the Aurunci Mountains.

The ridges in the hill triangle are extensively cultivated by use of terraces. At the time of the attack, vegetation was sparse and what there was stood less than ankle-high. Some of the hills, notably the forward slope of The Spur, are almost bare. Even where there are scattered trees, by 11 May most of them had been sheared off at half length by artillery fire. Sunken roads that are little more than farm trails wind their way across the ridges; the most important was the sunken road which branches off from the Santa Maria highway, then winds across the forward slope of The Spur and northeast to Pulcherini.

Less than three miles north of Santa Maria and across the Ausonia Valley, the main Aurunci range rises high above the small hills of the Mt. Bracchi triangle and afforded the enemy observation over the entire area. In the lower reaches of the mountains lie the town of Spigno and Mt. Civita, 900 and 1,800 feet, respectively, above the level of the Ausonia Valley.

The Germans had held the Bracchi hills for months; as part of their Gustav Line defenses from the Apennines to the sea. In the offensive that began on 18 January and netted only minor Allied gains, British 56 Division had captured Minturno and the east-west ridge at the base of the triangle. After this the enemy's main line of resistance ran from Hill 131 to Hill 103, across the road to The Spur, and thence to Pulcherini. South of this line the enemy had scattered machine-gun and sniper positions, sometimes in the houses along the road. On the high ground north and east of Santa Maria (Hills 153) 172 north, 172 south and 170) were other strongpoints.

Despite the efforts of patrols and aerial reconnaissance, the full extent of enemy defenses was not determined. Although in some cases machine-gun emplacements, minefields, and barbed-wire entanglements were accurately located before the action, many elements of the deeply organized defenses would be revealed only in the battle. Cleverly located automatic weapons, which covered extensive minefields and were in turn supported by mortars and light artillery, made up the principal defenses. Our troops would discover that the machine guns were so placed on forward and reverse slopes of the spurs and flanking ridges that they could bring a grazing cross fire on infantrymen advancing along either side of the road, as well as in the draws between the hills.



THE RIDGE ROAD

Axis for the 351st Infantry's attack, followed the crest and dipped between small knolls, offering good positions for enemy defenses. Exact location of this view is not known.

Pillbox shelters supporting the machine guns consisted of two main types. The first was a rectangular excavation, five feet by three feet, with pillars in each corner. Across the pillars were large wooden beams topped with three layers of railroad ties and a layer of stone and earth. The second type of pillbox was built into houses by digging three to four feet into the floor and reinforcing the dugout in a manner similar to the first type, except that only wooden beams and earth were used as reinforcement. Holding about five men, each type of pillbox furnished protection against shell fragments and served as a defensive base against infantry attacks.

Most of the German emplacements housing automatic weapons also had some form of overhead cover. At many points communications trenches ran from machine-gun positions to individual dugouts and fox holes where snipers were concealed. In some instances the Germans had alternate machinegun positions to which they could retreat if forced out of the bunkers that formed the first line of defense. A sufficient supply of ammunition was on hand at the front-line positions, from four to six boxes being available at each machine gun.¹

The Germans often protected their machine-gun positions with mines and barbed wire. The approaches to the S-Ridge, Tame, Santa Maria and the high ground west of it, and Pulcherini all were covered by fields of antipersonnel mines and in many cases by concertina wire. Yet, on the slopes south of Hill 103 and The Spur, where the enemy had set up a strong belt of machine-gun and sniper positions, mines and barbed wire were used sparingly and were found to present no serious obstacle to the advance of the 351st Infantry. Fields of antitank mines were placed along the Minturno-Santa Maria road between the Tits and The Spur, around Reali Creek in front of Santa Maria and Pulcherini, and along each side of the creek bed that runs east of the S-Ridge.

Defending the sector facing the 351st Infantry was the *94th Fusilier Reconnaissance Battalion (71st Infantry Division)* with an estimated strength of 400-500 men. At the time the Allied drive began, the *94th* consisted of four companies and held a front of approximately 1,200 yards, stretching from just west of Santa Maria to the eastern slope of Pulcherini. Elements of the *267th Grenadier Regiment (94th Infantry Division)*, the strength of which probably did not exceed 300-400 men, defended the S-Ridge. Both infantry units had heavy fire support. Several 8 8-mm cannon and self-propelled guns were situated along the road from Spigno to the Ausonia-Formia highway. Emplaced behind Mt. Civita was a battery of pack howitzers. The major portion of heavier artillery was located west and north of Spigno.

Two regiments were committed in the American attack in the Bracchi hills. The 351st Infantry would attack along a narrow front 100-200 yards wide, astride the Minturno-Santa Maria road. On the 351st's right flank, the 88th Division's reserve regiment, the 349th Infantry, would support the attack by fire of its heavy weapons. On the left of the 351st, the S-Ridge was the objective of the 338th Infantry, 85th Division. The two regiments attacking in the Bracchi triangle were to maintain contact by use of a patrol of one officer and two squads of riflemen; an SCR 300 radio would be used for communication, as well as a lateral telephone line between adjacent battalions of the two regiments.

1. Much of this information on German positions was acquired during and after the attack. In main features, the defenses were characteristic of other sectors on the Fifth Army front.



TERRAIN OF OPENING ATTACK

The 351st Infantry's plan of attack ([Map No. 3](#), page 122) provided that the 2d Battalion, making the main effort, would seize and hold the high ground to the north and east of Santa Maria, then reorganize to beat off counterattacks. The 3d Battalion would support the attack of the 2d Battalion by machine-gun and mortar fire from positions on Hills 130 and 132, about 800 yards east of the road. After the capture of Santa Maria it would pass through the 2d Battalion and seize the portion of Mt. Bracchi within the regimental zone of action. From Hill 135, on the ridge east of the 3d Battalion's supporting position, the 1st Battalion was to give supporting fire and to maintain contact with the 349th Infantry on the next ridge to its right. When the 3d Battalion was ready to move down the Minturno-Santa Maria road, the 1st Battalion would follow and seize Pulcherini.

The 2d Battalion's attack would be aided by tanks and by normal artillery support. After the mine platoon of the Antitank Company had removed mines, the 1st Platoon, Company C, 760th Tank Battalion would fire and maneuver along the Minturno-Santa Maria road. From positions in the Tufo area, the 2d Chemical Weapons Battalion and Company C, 804th Tank Destroyer Battalion would render fire support; 913th Field Artillery Battalion (105-mm howitzer), the Cannon Company, 351st Infantry from south of the Minturno-Tufo road, and the 339th Field Artillery Battalion (155-mm. howitzer) near the coast, would also be ready to fire.

The plan for the 2d Battalion, carrying the main assault, provided that two companies would jump off from the forward slope of Cemetery Ridge. Company F on the left of the Minturno-Santa Maria road and Company E on the right would advance in a formation of two platoons abreast with the third in reserve following closely. Each leading platoon would lay a white tape line as it moved forward. Company E's initial objectives were Hill 130 and the Right Tit; Company F's, the Left Tit. Once these were secured Company E would move ahead to capture The Spur and occupy the high ground east of Santa Maria, while Company F took Tame, and then went after the high ground north of Santa Maria. Following one objective behind Company E, Company G would go to the Y-junction south of Santa Maria and advance along the road through the town, closing the gap between Companies E and F and mopping up pockets of enemy resistance left by the assault companies. In the opinion of Lt. Col. Raymond E. Kendall, 2d Battalion commander, and Capt. Carl W. Nelson, Company F commander, only visual contact and radio communication would be required to keep E and F in touch with each other. The time schedule called for the troops to reach Santa Maria less than two hours after the jump-off.



MINTURNO was the base for the 351st Infantry's attack. This photograph, taken from the ruins of a house just south of the cemetery, shows the assembly area for the 2d Battalion's attack.

The Night Attack: Jump-off

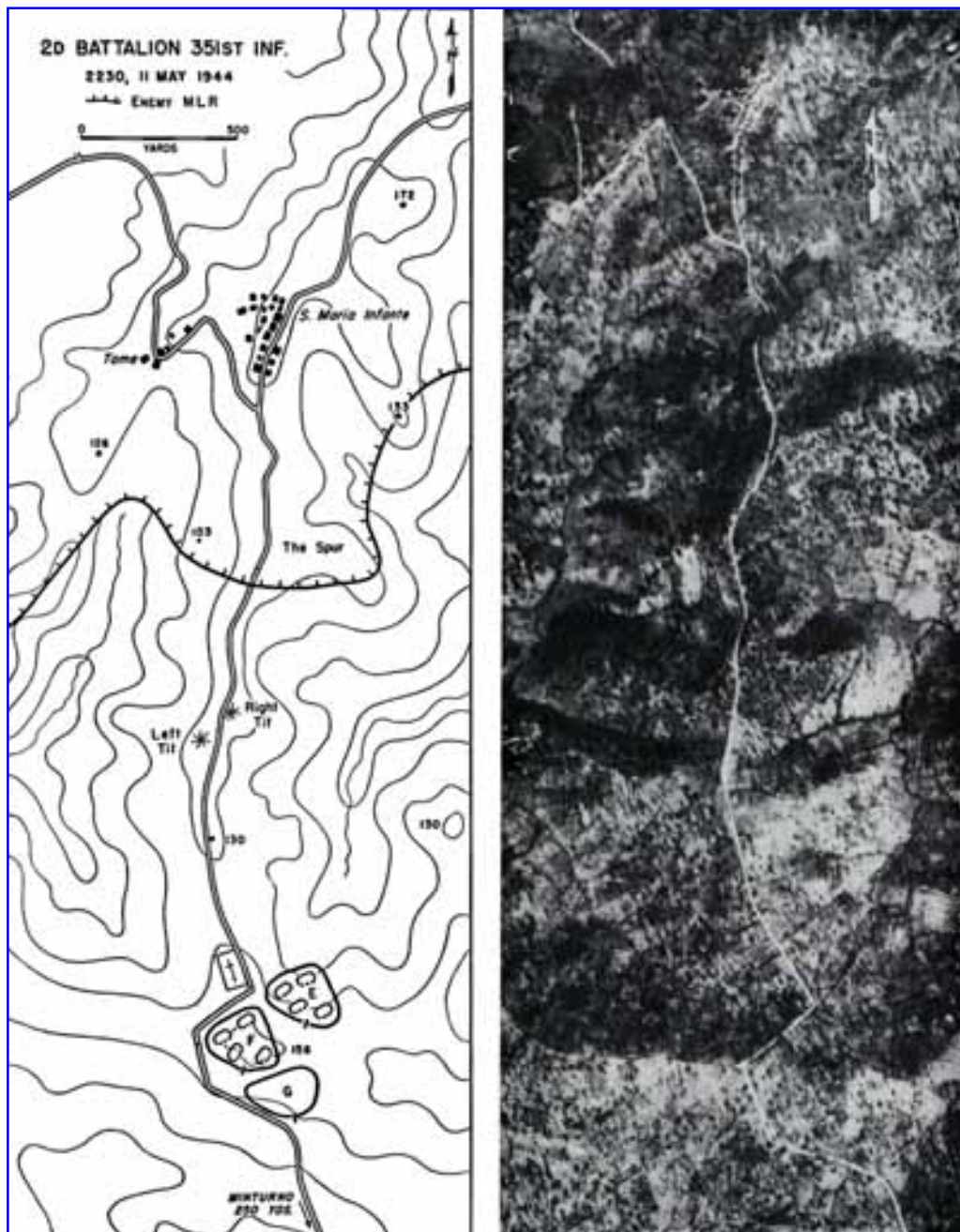
To achieve tactical surprise the attack was scheduled to begin in darkness, with no artillery preparation before H Hour, set for 2300. As it turned out, the advantages gained by surprise were balanced by the difficulties of attacking almost blind over hilly terrain. Confusion became the dominant feature of the battle for any group larger than a squad. Platoons were separated and companies had very little idea what was happening in their own zone, let alone on their flanks. The night action, therefore, has to be considered from the level of small groups and told in separate stories, out of which the larger picture can be reconstructed. During most of the night, all anyone knew was what was happening a few feet away.

Company F moved off from Cemetery Ridge before 2300 in order to pass through the cemetery, a favorite target of German artillery, before the enemy could detect our intentions ([Map No. 4](#)). At 2240 Company F crossed the Minturno-Santa Maria road, poked through a hole in the south wall of the cemetery, and marched silently across the cemetery with only one or two casualties, from mines. The 3d Platoon, led by 1st Lt. Jack L. Panich, led off on the right, moving forward 25 yards from the road. Abreast of it at 25 yards' interval the 2d Platoon, under Tech/Sgt. Robert A. Casey, was farther down the ridge slope, followed by the 1st Platoon in support, keeping visual contact.

Each platoon was echeloned in a column of squads, about two arms' lengths apart. On the right the company commander, Captain Nelson, with his command group and the 4th Platoon (Weapons Platoon), moved behind the 3d Platoon by the road; the 4th Platoon was ordered to proceed by bounds approximately one terrain feature behind the 3d Platoon. Following to the rear of each of the platoon columns, a section of heavy .30 cal. machine guns from Company H was directed to leapfrog forward from successive terrain features, one section at a time.

Progress was relatively fast, and the platoons aroused no enemy resistance. Leading elements of the 2d Platoon became entangled in some concertina wire, but were freed by Lieutenant Panich, only a few yards away, who took a wirecutter from one of his men and severed the strands. Just before both platoons reached the base of the Left Tit, the deafening sound of the supporting barrage of mortars, machine guns, and artillery opened up all along the Allied front. The men stopped, according to plan. On the other side of the road Company E moved up abreast of Company F through the no man's land that lay between Cemetery Ridge and the Tits, while Company G, in reserve in a forward assembly area below the crest of Hill 156, waited for the signal to join the battle. Over the heads of the infantry, streams of 40-mm tracers marked out routes of advance.

From this point on, the account of the night's battle must follow the separate actions of small groups of the 2d Battalion. No times are definite enough to permit any attempt at giving a situation report for the battalion or for companies at any periods before daylight. In many cases, squads or platoons fight over the same terrain, without making friendly contact-an indication that these actions must have taken place at different times during the hours of darkness.



MAP NO. 4 and aerial photograph taken 11 November 1943

1. To show more clearly the formation it adopted at this period of the assault, the 3d Platoon is presented on this map in a generalized manner. Actually, it occupied a much smaller area than this map suggests, and it began the assault from positions just west of the road between Point 130 and the Left Tit. All routes of advance in this and later sketches for the night action are approximations.

Company F will be the first unit traced through the attack, beginning with the 3d Platoon. But the story of that platoon quickly becomes the several stories of its squads.

According to schedule, the Left Tit was taken under fire by machine guns, mortars, and artillery. Holding up for 20 minutes for our barrage to lift, Lieutenant Panich decided to deploy the 3d Platoon from a column of squads to a formation of two squads up and abreast, and two in the rear in a skirmish line ([Map No. 5](#)).¹ In the first wave were the 1st Squad on the left, commanded by Cpl. Robert F. Tyler, and on the right the 2d Squad under S/Sgt. Charles Spero. Echeloned to the right rear were the 3d Squad under Sgt. Peter Pyenta and the 4th Squad, led by S/Sgt. Edmond B. Hoppes. But the 4th Squad had already become detached in the dense smoke and heavy fire, and was out of contact. (See later, page 138.)

After our barrage was lifted from the Left Tit, the 3d Platoon, less the 4th Squad, pushed up the southern slope. Nearing the crest, the 1st and 3d Squads veered to the right, struck the road, and moved along it for a few yards until the platoon leader, Lieutenant Panich, intercepted them. He warned the 1st and 3rd Squad leaders of mines on the road and steered them back to the slope west of it; then Panich went back to the Left Tit where the 2d Squad, under Sergeant Spero, had waited. Led by Sergeant Pyenta, the 1st and 3d Squads were off alone on one of the adventures of the night attack.

Sergeant Pyenta's Group at Hill 103

Moving west from the road, the 1st and 3d Squads, 3d Platoon moved down the ridge slope beyond the Left Tit and swung west of house No. 2. Here they turned east again and moved up along the terraces below Hill 103 at a fast trot.¹ A mine exploded, killing one man and wounding two more in the 3d Squad, but the squads stopped only briefly for the determination of casualties, then continued to push up the rising ground near Hill 103 to a point south of house No. 6 and west of the big house No. 7 on the road. There two explosions, caused either by demolition charges or by artillery shells hitting in the dirt and driving it skyward, rocked the earth near the two squads and knocked them to the ground. Picking themselves up, the men started for the road, or for where they guessed it to be. Climbing up over the next terrace, they followed it for about 15 yards until they hit a double strand of concertina wire. It was then about 0100 and the moon had come out, although smoke and fog obscured it.

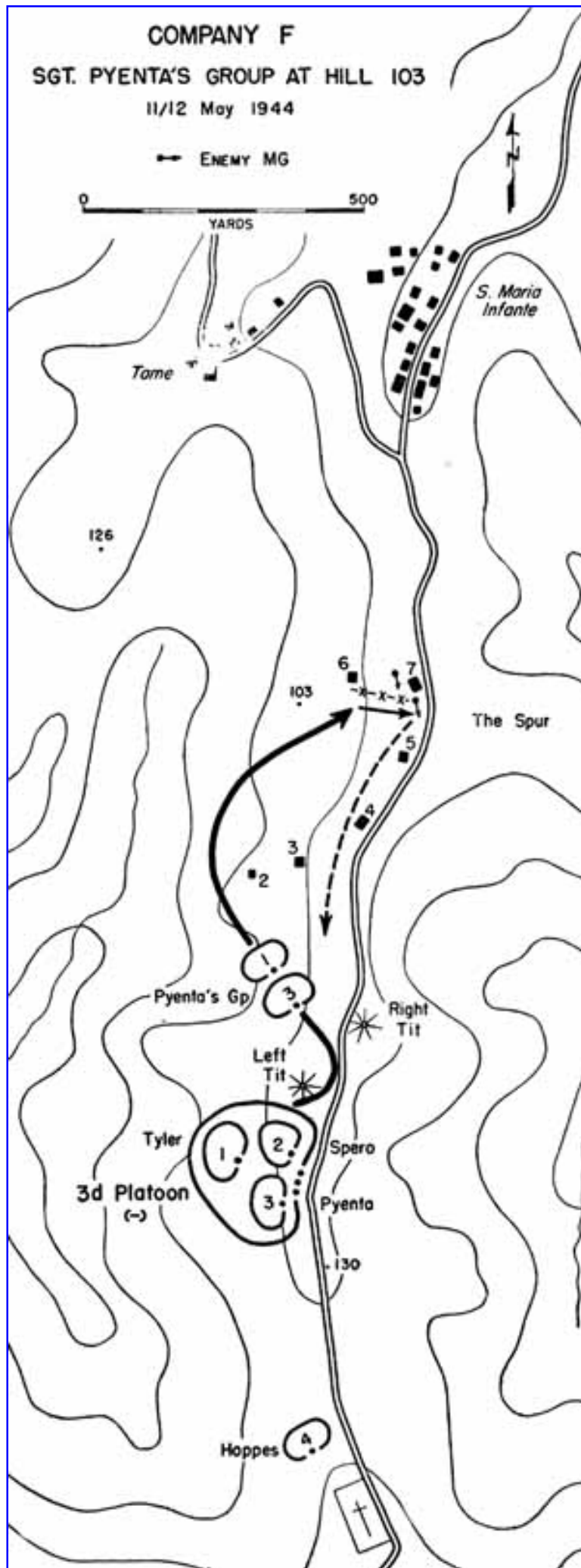
Corporal Tyler, still in the lead of the 1st and 3d Squads, came back to Sergeant Pyenta to report that he could not get through the wire because no wirecutters were at hand.

The 3d Squad's assistant leader, who carried a wirecutter, had become detached from the squad. Unable to move ahead, Sergeant Pyenta and Corporal Tyler decided to bypass the wire, go up toward the road, and follow it until they contacted other elements of Company F, who were thought to be somewhere ahead toward Tame. Turning away from the wire, Corporal Tyler and the survivors of his squad started off, racing over the terrace as fast- as they could make it. As he passed from view above the first terrace, Corporal Tyler called back to Sergeant Pyenta, "The road's up here!" The words were scarcely out of his mouth before bursts of machine-gun fire silenced him and mowed down the rest of his squad. The fire came from two automatic weapons, one in house No. 7 on the road, the other in a dugout behind the barbed wire and on the left flank of the 1st Squad. It was the latter gun, firing at point-blank range, which did most of the damage. Along with the two machine guns, a machine pistol fired into the 1st Squad from a few yards to the left of the dugout.

One rifleman in the 3d Squad unloaded eight shots in the direction from which the machine pistol had fired. The rest of the 3d Squad opened up on the two German machine guns with everything they had, shooting rifle grenades and throwing hand grenades at the two positions. When the shower of explosives was over, the machine guns were silent; the enemy had either been knocked out or had retreated to other positions. But during the fight the 1st and 3d Squads were reduced to nine men, including the 3d Squad leader, Sergeant Pyenta.

As he had no idea where to find other troops of Company F, believed to be ahead, Sergeant Pyenta decided to withdraw with the few remaining men to try to contact other elements of the company in the rear. Walking along the slope near the road, but dropping to the ground whenever artillery shells came close, Sergeant Pyenta and his eight men moved back toward the rear.¹ When they reached the slope of a little knoll situated between Hill 103 and the Left Tit, they saw a man outlined against the crest. Thinking that he was from Company F, Sergeant Pyenta called out, "Hey, is that the 3d Platoon up there?" The man dropped from view, and a grenade, which exploded harmlessly above the 3d Squad, answered the question. The 3d Squad did not return the fire. Picking up a tape line left by some other unit in advance, the men followed the marker until they reached a shell hole 150 yards north of the cemetery. Here they found Lieutenant Panich and a handful of men who had pulled back, after troubles of their own, on a similar search for other elements of Company F. Lieutenant Panich's story is next.

1. Hill 103 is only a small knoll at the end of a very minor spur west of the road, a rise in no way comparable to The Spur just on the other side of the ridge.



Lieutenant Panich's Group at Hill 103

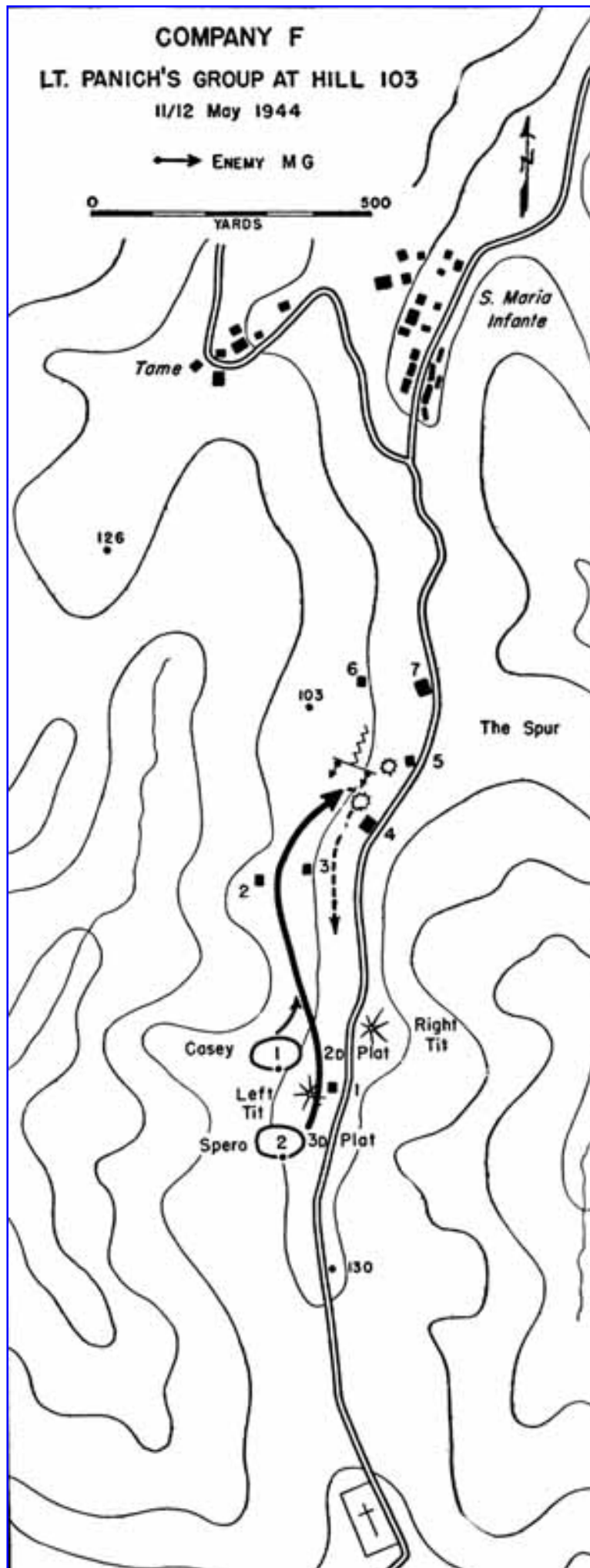
In the advance of the 1st and 3d Squads of the 3d Platoon beyond the Left Tit, the 2d Squad had fallen behind and lost contact with them as well as with the 4th Squad.

Lieutenant Panich was with the 2d Squad; informed that neither the rest of his platoon nor the other platoons of Company F were behind him, Panich set out to catch up with the advance and soon ran into Sergeant Casey, the acting leader of the 2d Platoon ([Map No. 6](#)). This platoon had led off the left column of Company F's advance. Sergeant Casey was in a situation like that of Lieutenant Panich. He had lost contact with most of his platoon and had decided to look for the 3d Platoon. Meeting on the slope beyond the Left Tit, Panich and Casey consolidated the remnants of two squads which they had with them: six men with Sergeant Casey from the 1st Squad of the 2d Platoon and five men, including Lieutenant Panich, from the 3d Platoon.

Ignorant of Captain Nelson's whereabouts, Lieutenant Panich decided to push on until he caught up with the other squads of the 3d Platoon, which he judged were all ahead of him. The makeshift force walked fast up the forward slopes of Hill 103 under cover of an ascending row of terraces, which protected them from the machine guns on the crest of the hill. In the lead of the group was Sergeant Spero, who took off from the Left Tit and across to Hill 103 like a wild Indian, yelling and running with his tommy gun at his hip. With mortar shells falling all around them, Panich's group arrived at the highest terrace on the slope, which was the last line of protective cover against machine-gun fire. Here they dropped in a big shell hole to explore the situation and decide what to do. Thirty-five yards beyond the terrace, over which concertina wire was strung, there were two dugouts on the crest from which machine guns were firing. Above them and near the road was a house, No. 5. Since the top of the terrace was in the direct line of enemy machine-gun fire, rifles were useless and hand grenades had to be thrown at the dugouts.

When this tactic produced no visible results, Lieutenant Panich left a few men in the big shell hole and led the rest, with Sergeant Spero in the van, over the terrace toward the machine-gun emplacements.

1. In doing so, they apparently skirted the enemy positions just west of house No. 5, where Panich's group fought their action (see next section), but without seeing the enemy or drawing fire. That this could happen in night fighting is possible, but it is also conceivable that the men interviewed were mistaken as to their exact locations near Hill 103, and that the Pyenta and Panich groups may have fought the same enemy positions, at different times. The matter could not be settled by interview on the ground.



They burst into the barbed wire and pulled themselves through without injury except to their pants. Under heavy mortar and machine-gun fire, they crawled forward until they reached an open communications trench into which they dropped for protection. They were a little beyond the enemy machine guns. The trench connected the two machine-gun dugouts with sleeping quarters and other enemy positions on the reverse slope of Hill 103; it was from 30-50 yards long and 5-6 feet deep, but was barely wide enough for one man to wriggle through. Between the south end of the communications trench and the two machine-gun dugouts ran small covered passageways. Protected from machine-gun fire as long as they kept their heads below the surface, Lieutenant Panich's men threw hand grenades at the German positions until they exhausted their supply.

At this point Lieutenant Panich and Sergeant Casey decided that they could not remain much longer in the trench, chiefly because of our own mortar fire which had begun to plaster the whole crest of the hill. Climbing out of the trench, Lieutenant Panich crawled to a shell hole only a few yards away from the house near the road. There he saw a dozen men dash across the road, but could not tell whether they were friendly or enemy. Before long a hand grenade landing near Panich's shell hole resolved his doubts and sent him scurrying back to the communications trench, where he jumped in on top of Sergeant Casey.

Still undecided what they should do, Sergeant Casey and Lieutenant Panich had their minds made up by a succession of events that cut the strength of their force sharply and led them to believe that they were surrounded. Repeated efforts to contact Captain Nelson by radio had produced no results: every time Pvts. Warner W. Ogden and Richard C. Pelham tuned in on their SCR 536's they could hear only their own voices. In the meantime word was passed from the rear to the front of the communications trench that Sgt. Frederick H. Neddo, who had been left with a handful of men in a shell hole below the terrace, had been shot and that Lieutenant Panich's whole group was surrounded. After Sergeant Neddo was hit, Sergeant Casey saw a man about 10 yards away to the left walking toward him and called out, "Who is that?" The reply came back from a German "zipper" pistol;¹ the shots knocked Sergeant Casey's rifle out of his hand and damaged Lieutenant Panich's carbine. Nothing more was needed to make Lieutenant Panich and Sergeant Casey decide it was high time to vacate their spot. With all but two men along, they piled out of the trench, dove over the terrace below it, and wriggled into the big shell hole where the wounded Sergeant Neddo was lying.

Private Ogden and Sergeant Spero remained behind in the communications trench. Ogden traded shots with the German who was using the machine pistol and, though wounded in the exchange, killed the German, who toppled headlong into the trench.

1. One of the common soldier terms for the machine pistol. Another was "burp" gun.

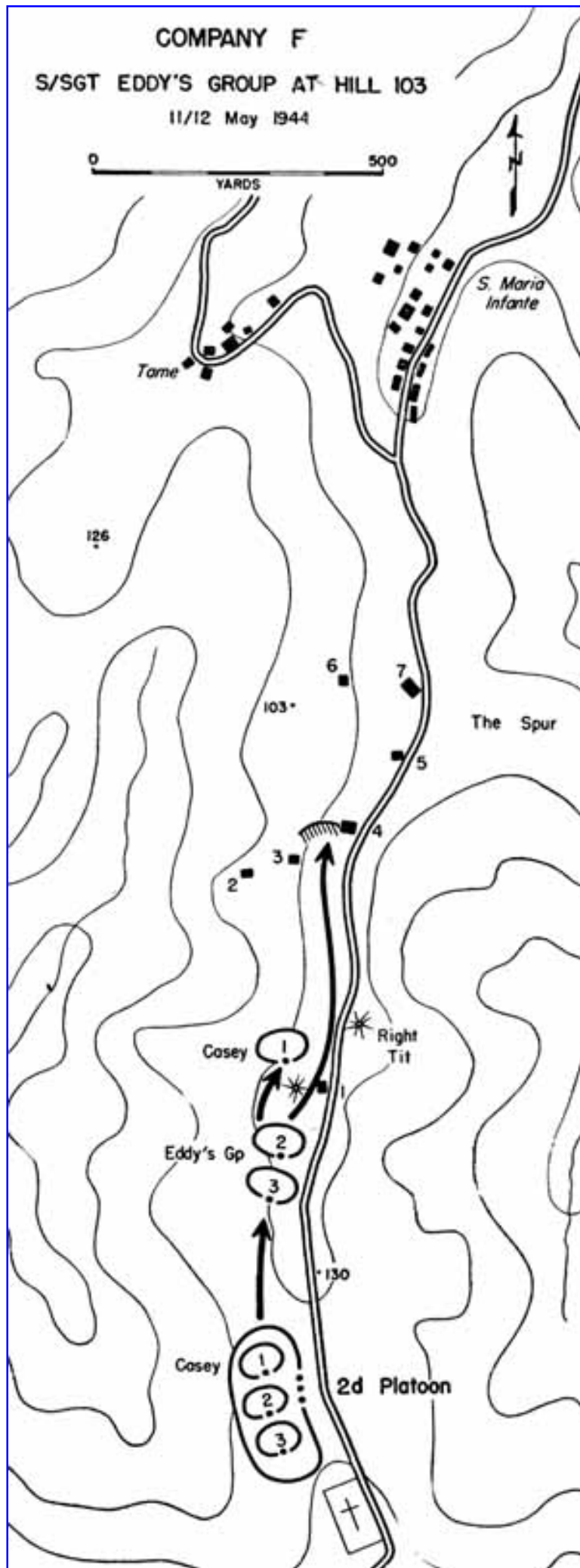
Sergeant Spero then crawled toward the southern end of the trench. On the way back, as Sergeant Spero stuck his leg in the underground passageway to the left-hand machine-gun dugout, he was shot by a German crouched inside it. Wounded but still very much alive, Sergeant Spero edged around the corner of the passageway and tommy-gunned his assailant.

The other men in the shell hole below the terrace waited while Sergeant Spero and Ogden were fighting with Germans in and around the machine-gun positions. Lieutenant Panich organized security around the shell hole, putting four men in front on the bank before the terrace, one on the right flank, and himself and another man on the left flank and rear. For what seemed like ages, but really was a little less than an hour, Panich waited for Ogden and Spero to come down, while German shells poured in on the south slope of Hill 103 and killed two more of his dwindling force. Finally, when the two men failed to show up, Lieutenant Panich sent his three remaining men to report what had happened to battalion headquarters. He and Sergeant Casey stayed 15 minutes longer, hoping against hope that Ogden and Spero would join them. At the end of this time, when they still had not come, Panich and Casey gave them up for dead¹ and started back for Company F's assembly area behind Cemetery Ridge. Crawling, walking, or running as the occasion demanded, they moved along close to the road, meeting no Germans but now and then coming under machine-gun fire. Finally Lieutenant Panich and Sergeant Casey reached a big shell hole along the slope near the road 150 yards north of the Minturno, cemetery, where Sergeant Pyenta and his eight men soon joined them. All then went back to the jump-off point, reaching it before daylight; they took no further part in the battle.

The two groups of the 3d Platoon during the fighting on Hill 103 had been completely out of contact, and neither group had knowledge that any friendly troops were close by. Actually, since the times cannot be fixed, their separate battles may well have taken place at considerable intervals. Nor were they the only forces of Company F engaged at Hill 103; a group of the 2d Platoon, led by S/Sgt. Paul M. Eddy, reached that same area during the night fighting.

Sergeant Eddy's Group at Hill 103

The 2d Platoon had become disorganized and scattered early in the attack. At jump-off time the 2d Platoon had started out in column of squads, each squad in single file, the 1st Squad leading. They got as far as the base of the Left Tit in this formation ([Map No. 7](#)). Here the 2d and 3d Squads came under heavy fire from our own machine guns, which were supposed to be firing on the Tit and over the heads of our men but were dropping some rounds short. A bullet smashed through the mouth of the 2d Squad leader, disabling him; other casualties were suffered in the 3d Squad. The assistant leader of the 2d Squad then took command, but the five or six men whom he had left refused to follow. It was during this confusion that the 2d and 3d Squads lost contact with the 1st, elements of which, under Sergeant Casey, were to join up with Lieutenant Panich.



MAP NO. 7

After the 2d Squad's assistant leader had tried vainly to move his men out, Sergeant Eddy consolidated what was left of the two squads and led them around to the east of the Left Tit, crawling under our machinegun fire and meeting some German artillery fire. As shells and bullets started hitting all around, the men in the rear stopped. Only a few men kept up with Sergeant Eddy, who thought that his whole force was close behind him. After crawling a few yards, they saw several figures moving around a nearby house, No. 1. Sergeant Eddy called to them, asking if they were from the 2d Platoon. When hand grenades answered the query, Sergeant Eddy sent a messenger back to the rest of the 2d and M Squads, ordering them to come up. Eight or nine men responded, but by that time the enemy opposition had disappeared.

Following terraces, the remnants of the 2d and 3 d Squads then moved out again close to the road. They got as far as the start of the gentle rise in ground toward Hill 103; then artillery shells hit squarely in their midst, killing a BAR man and wounding several others. When the fire was over, only five men, including Sergeant Eddy, were left.

In addition to the enemy artillery, machine guns on the crest of Hill 103 as well as snipers along the road placed fire on the small group. After firing antitank grenades at the machine guns, Sergeant Eddy and his men decided to wait for reinforcements from the 1st Platoon, which was supposed to be following the 2d Platoon.

A few minutes later some men came down the road from the direction of Minturno: the much needed reinforcements, so Sergeant Eddy thought. He called out to them, but was answered by rifles and machine guns. Sergeant Eddy's force tossed hand grenades, then shot an antitank grenade that landed in the enemy group, dispersing the Germans and putting an end to the fire fight. The handful of men from the 2d and 3d Squads, 2d Platoon dug in where they were, west of the road facing the slopes toward Hill 10 3. By the time they had finished dawn was breaking. All day long on 12 May, under heavy fire, they waited there vainly for the 3d Battalion to reach them. Just before midnight, 12 hours after the jump-off, they returned to Cemetery Ridge.

Advance to the Tame Road

Other elements of Company F had kept together more successfully than the assault squads of the 2d and 3d Platoons. By separate routes of advance, two main groups succeeded in reaching a culvert on the Santa Maria-Tame road, only a few yards from the company objective, house No. 12 at the inverted V-bend.

1. Ogden and Spero later returned unassisted to the 2d Battalion aid station.

The first group to reach this most advanced position, 2,500 yards from the line of departure, was the 4th Squad, 3d Platoon led by Captain Nelson. By dawn these men were joined by the 4th Platoon, remnants of the 1st Platoon, three machine-gun squads from Company H, and Company F Headquarters ([Map No. 8](#)).

During the initial advance, the 4th Squad of the 3d Platoon had lost contact with the 3d Squad some 50 yards beyond the cemetery and within 25 yards of the road. At that time heavy smoke and fog made it hard to see even ten yards away. Machinegun fire from the eastern slope of the S-Ridge at Hill 131, as well as mortar and artillery fire which seemed to come from all directions, pinned down the 4th Squad where the ground sloped into a small saddle between the cemetery and Hill 130.

When the squad lost contact with the rest of the 3d Platoon, word was passed back to Captain Nelson, who was in the middle of the right column with the 4th Platoon, to come up and take charge. Before the 4th Squad reached the bottom of the saddle, Captain Nelson caught up with it. When he arrived, the squad was receiving fire from a machine gun on the higher ground toward Hill 130.

For some reason, whether because they had not seen the leading rifle squads of the 2d and 3d Platoons, or had moved into positions on the knoll after Company F's elements passed by, or had planned an ambush, the German machine gunners had not previously fired. To knock out the enemy position Captain Nelson called for the light machine guns and mortars from the 4th Platoon. They were brought forward promptly and placed in the saddle. At that range, the mortars fired almost straight up in the air, but neither they nor the machine guns could drive the enemy from his position. These means failing, Captain Nelson grabbed an M-1 rifle from one of his men and fired a grenade point-blank at the machine gun, knocking it out and killing the two gunners.

After the enemy gun was silenced, the 4th Squad, 3d Platoon under Captain Nelson's leadership progressed so rapidly over the ridge slopes west of the Minturno-Santa Maria road that it lost contact with the follow-up units: the 4th Platoon, the 1st Platoon, headquarters command group, and the machine gunners from Company H. During their advance the men of the 4th Squad ran fast in a half-crouch, using the terraces and the shell holes that pockmarked the route of advance for protection against machine-gun fire which was coming over their heads from the northern end of the creek valley toward the S-Ridge. In contrast to the routes used by other elements, the 4th Squad seems to have kept on the lower slopes of the ridge, well away from the road.

Moving past the small spur made by the Left Tit and Hill 103, they reached a point 300 yards beyond 103 before encountering enemy; here they captured 2 mortars and 15 Germans in dugouts, half-dressed and completely taken by surprise. After a brief exchange of fire with another small group of the enemy who were using machine pistols from the left front, near the bottom of the creek valley, the 4th Squad pushed on without meeting further resistance until it came to the culvert near the inverted V-bend on the Tame-Santa Maria road. Dawn was just breaking, but the smoke and haze were so dense that visibility was nearly zero. In a short while, stronger elements of Company F joined up at the culvert position.

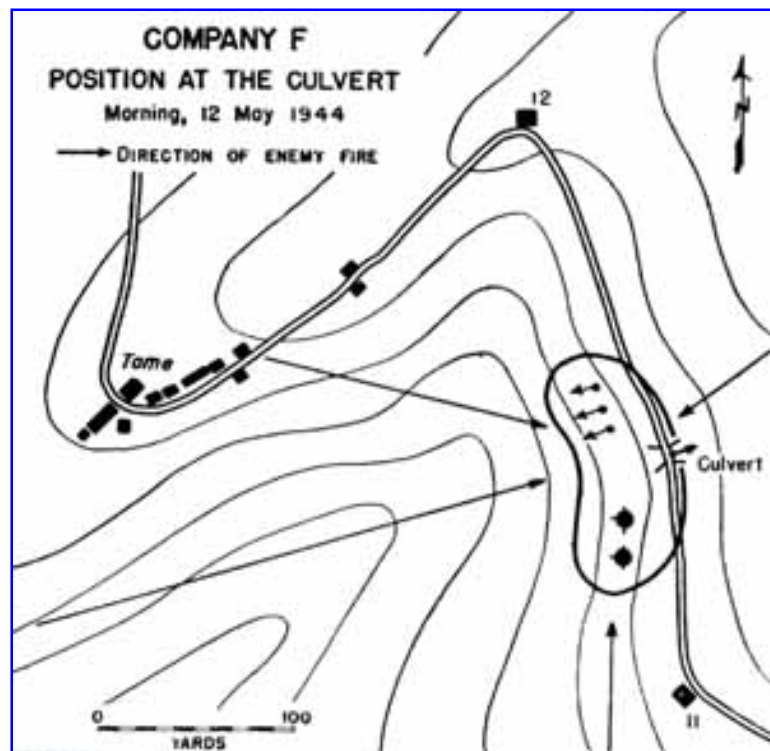
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Just behind the 4th Squad, 3d Platoon at the saddle north of the cemetery, the 4th Platoon (Weapons), led by 1st Lt. Robert C. Kozuch, was soon outdistanced. One machine-gun section from Company H followed this platoon. After being slowed down by barbed wire beyond the cemetery, the group moved across the higher ground beyond the saddle without meeting resistance and went around the western slope of the Left Tit. By that time one squad of the machine-gun section had become separated in the darkness. As soon as the loss was discovered 2d Lt. Eugene Loper, platoon leader of Company H, united the remaining squad with another machine-gun section that had drifted off from the right column of Company F's assault force. Meanwhile the 1st Platoon, which was supposed to advance behind the 2d Platoon but had been unable to keep in contact with it, caught up and fell in behind the 4th Platoon.

Halfway across the Left Tit the 4th Platoon received fire from a machine gun on Hill 101. The machine guns and mortars of the 4th Platoon were set up in a shallow ditch on the reverse slope of the Tit, returned the fire for a short time, and apparently disposed of the enemy gun. When it became silent, the men of the 4th Platoon again moved forward. They had advanced only 15 yards when a machine gun or machine pistol-it was hard to tell which-began firing down their backs from the crest of the Left Tit. Hugging the side of a terrace wall, the 4th Platoon passed out of range and then walked across a shallow draw beyond the Left Tit.

The platoon continued to follow terraces along the slope until it approached a house, No. 4, on the left side of the road. Here the 4th Platoon veered northwest down into the creek valley below the ridge. After climbing over a terrace, the platoon had gone only a few yards when heavy mortar fire pinned it down five to ten minutes.

1st Lt. John M. Weston, company executive officer, called for the 1st Platoon to come up as reinforcements. The men trickled up, a few at a time, but only the equivalent of a squad reached the 4th Platoon. Arriving soon after the mortar fire ceased, this handful from the 1st Platoon, as well as the 4th Platoon, moved along a ditch leading toward the creek and then swung around the western slope of Hill 10 3. When the mortar fire was over the column of men from the 4th and 1st Platoons and Company Headquarters had deployed in a staggered, spread formation. Without meeting further resistance they pushed on north until they reached a point near house No. 11, which was on the Tame-Santa Maria road between the Y-Junction and the culvert. Here they were stopped by a voice which called to them in perfect English, "Headquarters this way." After a silence, the German discharged a machine pistol straight up in the air. The men of the 4th and 1st Platoons lined up against a terrace near the house and waited for the German to come closer in order to get him from point-blank range. They heard him coming, but before they could bring him in their sights, he about-faced and went off in the dark.



MAP NO. 9

After this incident, the group pushed on to the culvert and joined forces with Captain Nelson's party. The three squads from the machine-gun platoon of Company H had managed to keep up with the advance.

Just as this reinforcement reached Captain Nelson at the culvert, American artillery shells as well as German machine-gun and mortar fire from the S-Ridge began to fall on the area. Although our shelling ceased after word went back by radio for the artillery to lift, the German fire made the draw a dangerous place. Only the stoned-in culvert, which ran under the road 150 yards south of the inverted V-bend, offered much protection from this fire. About 20 men jammed into the small passageway until they were packed in like sardines; those who could not use the culvert dug in against terraces close by ([Map No. 9](#)). West of the road, machine guns from Company H were emplaced on a flat surface below the road and the highest terrace. One light machine gun was put in a drainage hole through the top and far end of the culvert tunnel. The 60-mm mortars were placed in defiladed positions from 15 to 30 yards to the right of the culvert on the slope below the road. To wipe out resistance in Tame and reduce the pressure against his force) Captain Nelson sent a squad of five men with a light machine gun to a house in the northeastern part of the village. After harassing the enemy for several hours, the squad was captured.

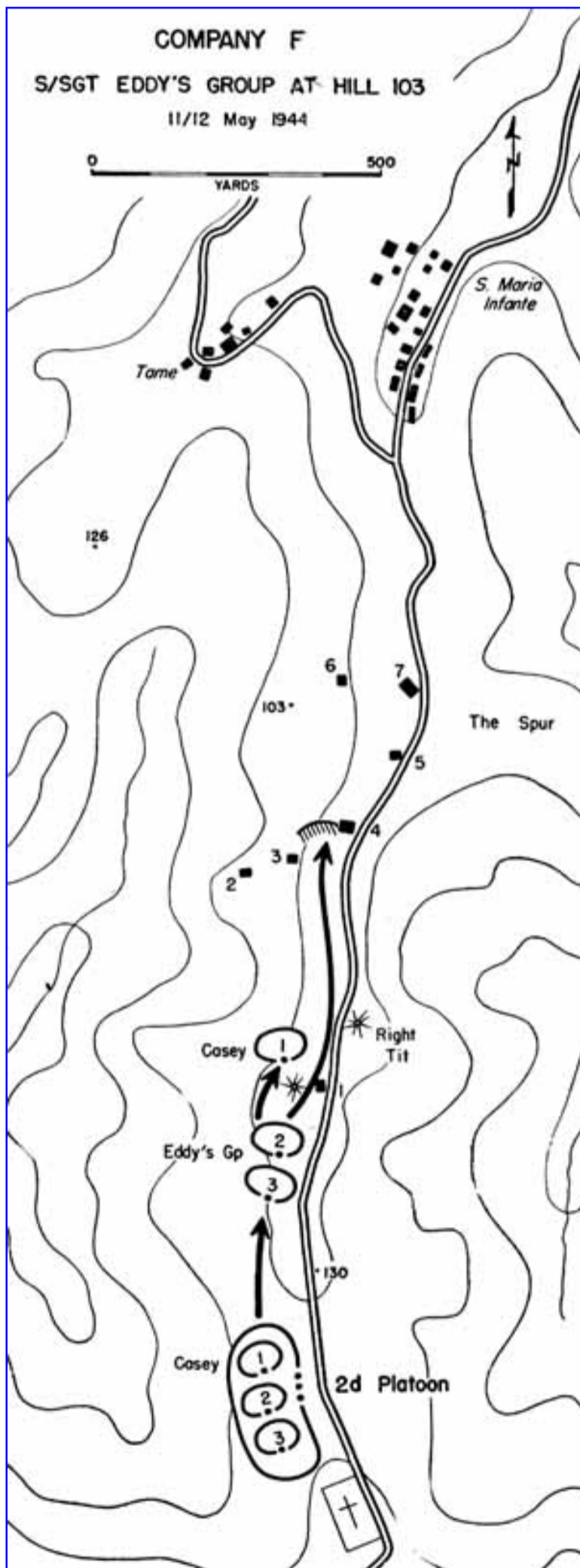
While Captain Nelson's men were digging in at the culvert, the Germans opened up from all directions. They fired from the S-Ridge and Tame on the rear and left flank of the positions at the culvert, and from the high ground north of Santa Maria. If the Germans had ever withdrawn or been driven from Hill 103, they now returned. They used their automatic weapons on Hill 103 and in a house at the head of the creek valley. German mortars in a haystack on the eastern slope of Hill 126 (on the S-Ridge) and in well concealed positions north of Tame lobbed shells into the area held by Company F. About 0800 a group of snipers armed with machine pistols and rifles came down from Hill 126 toward the draw between that hill and the Santa Maria-Tame road. Observing them move up, Company F opened fire, and the Germans had to run for the cover of the creek bed. But they reached it, and throughout the day exchanged fire with Company F. Neither force caused the other many casualties, but the enemy in the valley formed a serious threat to any withdrawal of Company F. In fact, with Hill 103 in enemy hands, Captain Nelson's small force was now practically cut off.

The defending group at the culvert, 400 yards beyond Hill 103, was the only sizable force of Company F which was able to hold ground beyond the line of departure throughout 12 May. Sergeant Eddy's handful from the 2d Platoon held out near Hill 103 through the day and until midnight, but the rest of the units (Sergeant Pyenta with the remnants of the 3d Platoon, and Lieutenant Panich and Sergeant Casey with survivors from the 2d and 3d Platoons) had been disintegrated by casualties and had pulled back to Cemetery Ridge.

Company F's attack had met unexpectedly strong enemy resistance, but had suffered also through the failure of communications and the lack of coordination between units in the darkness.

As the SCR 536 radios were out of commission most of the time, or unable to reach adjacent units, Company Headquarters with Captain Nelson could scarcely ever find out what his lead platoons were doing. During the attack the flank patrol of the 338th Infantry was unable to keep in touch with Company F, nor was visual contact ever established between Companies E and F.

As it happened, Company E, over on the right wing, was having as little success as did the Company F's attack west of the Minturno-Santa Maria road.



Tame was a small cluster of buildings west of Santa Maria. From it, Germans fired at members of Company F that had reached culvert. Photo is from high ground near Santa Maria, looking across the Tame road. Culvert area is either at left edge or just beyond it. The large house at right is on the Y-turn of the road leading to Tame.

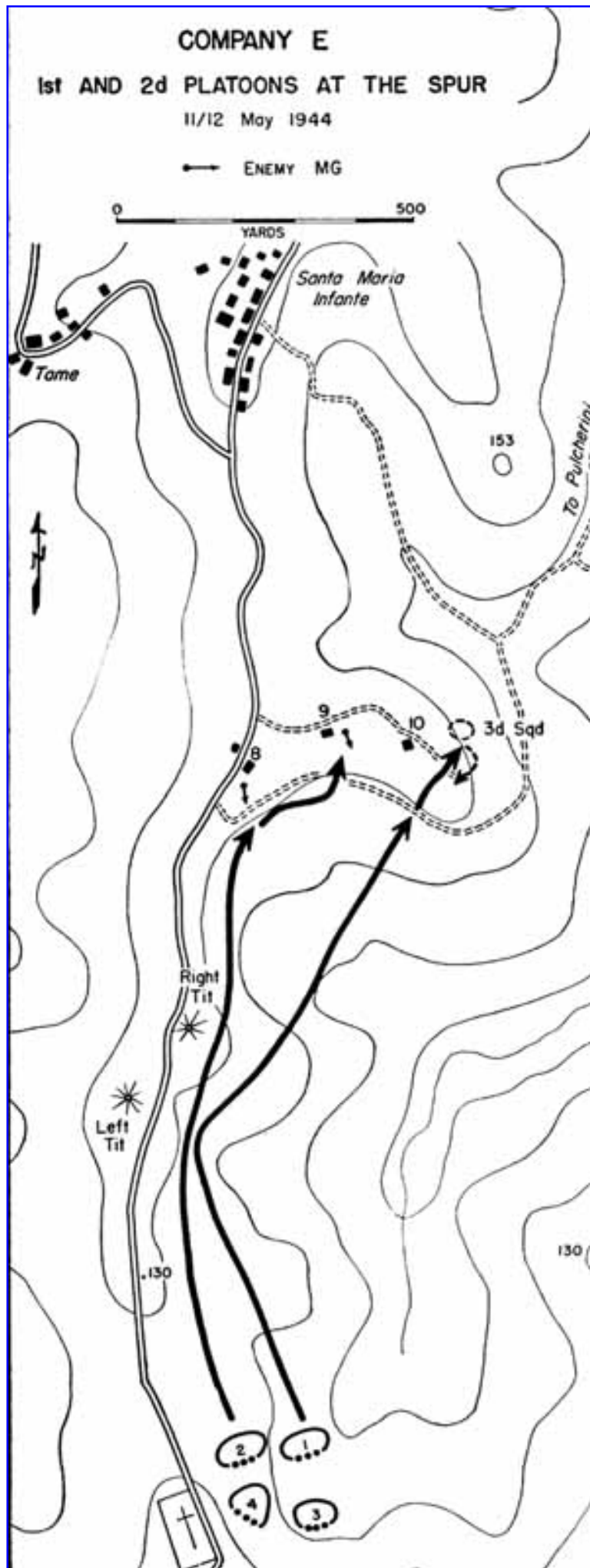
Jumping off at 2300, Company E had swiftly advanced along the east side of the road. In a box formation of two columns, the 1st Platoon on the right and the 2d Platoon on the left led the advance. The 3d Platoon followed the 1st, and the 4th Platoon followed the 2d at a distance of 100 yards. The left-hand column was 75 yards from the road and the right column 75 yards farther east along the slope ([Map No. 10](#)).

Leading the right column, the 1st and 2d Squads of the 1st Platoon, abreast, moved so fast that they soon lost contact with the 3d Squad following in reserve.



MINTURNO-SANTA MARIA INFANTE RIDGE,
Looking north from the cemetery. (This aerial oblique taken April 1946.)

Before reaching the Right Tit the 1st Platoon mistakenly veered from its predetermined route of advance and swung hard toward the road behind the 2d Platoon. After walking in that direction for some distance, 2d Lt. William K. Stauss, the platoon leader, realized his error and cut back sharply to the right away from the road. While they were making this unintentional detour the 2d Platoon had outdistanced the 1st Platoon, which was ordered by Capt. Robert K. Carlstone, the company commander, to close the gap and come up abreast.



MAP NO. 10
 Company E at The Spur: 1st Platoon

North of the Right Tit machine-gun fire held up the 1st and 2d Squads, still leading the 1st Platoon, for about ten minutes.

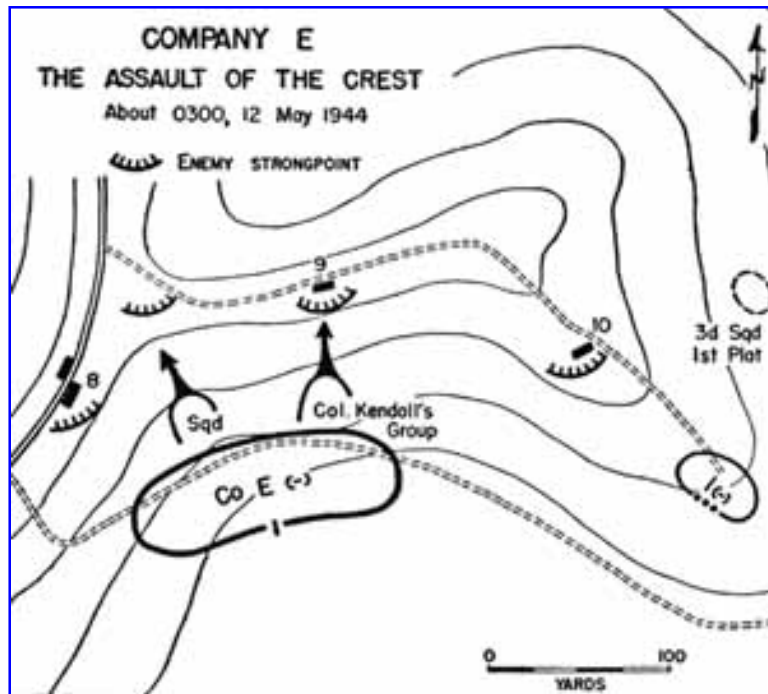
As they crossed the shallow draw north of the Tit and pushed up the southern slope of The Spur, machine guns on its crest were firing over their heads. To reorganize and get their bearing the squads stopped briefly at the sunken road which runs across the forward slope. After the 3d Squad caught up with half later. The platoon's SCR 536, which had not worked all night, was put back into operation and was instrumental in getting our artillery fire lifted. But neither the radio nor patrols from the 1st Platoon had been able to maintain contact with the 2d Platoon on the left, which had been expected to meet much stiffer resistance near the road.

Company E at The Spur: The Main Body

On the left flank of Company E the two lead squads of the 2d Platoon had moved swiftly along the slope of the central ridge, meeting no resistance except sniper and artillery fire. With the left squad in sight of the road, the two squads moved over the Right Tit, crossed the draw at the base of The Spur, and went up its southern slope until they struck the sunken road. Here the 2d Platoon turned right along the sunken road for about 100 yards and then branched off, heading up the slope. It had reached a point 75 yards south of the second house from the road, No. 9, when machine guns from the crest pinned it down.

During the advance of the 2d Platoon, the 3d Squad in reserve had become separated from the two leading squads. By the time the 3d Squad reached the Right Tit, artillery and mortar fire was so heavy that further advance seemed out of the question. Before the squad had been on the Tit long, Captain Carlstone with his company headquarters group came up and led the men over the crest. Then, more heavy mortar and artillery fire forced them back to the comparative safety of shell holes and a big ditch on the southern slope of the Right Tit. Again Captain Carlstone led the 3d Squad over the crest. This time the squad had just cleared it when mortar fire wounded Captain Carlstone in the hand. Ordering the squad to move on across the northern slope of the Right Tit, Captain Carlstone dropped back to the ditch on the southern slope. He called for artillery fire on The Spur, from which our artillery had lifted their fires, according to schedule, at H +60.

After the 3d Squad, 2d Platoon had moved out beyond the Right Tit, the 4th Platoon led by 1st Lt. Harold V. McSwain came up on that hill, accompanied by most of the 3d Platoon ([Map No. 11](#)). This unit was to have followed the 1st Platoon in the right column, but somehow got lost and became sandwiched in with the 4th Platoon on the left. Informed that enemy snipers and machine guns were on the northern slope of the Right Tit near the road, Lieutenant McSwain sent Sgt. Earl Le Beau, machinegun section leader, with three gunners to locate and wipe out the German positions. At the crest of the hill, the gunners found no machine guns and only one rifleman, whom they swiftly dispatched.



MAP NO. 12

The wounded company commander put Lieutenant McSwain in charge of Company E, since his executive officer, 1st Lt. Harold W. Moore, was 1,500 yards away on the reverse slope of Cemetery Ridge. The 2d Battalion commander, Colonel Kendall, had come up on the Right Tit; disturbed because the company was lagging behind its time schedule, he pushed McSwain and his men of the 3d and 4th Platoons forward from the hill, tapping the men with his stick and urging them forward. As they moved off, Colonel Kendall and Captain Carlstone remained in a ditch on the southern slope of the Tit and kept on calling for artillery fire until it was placed on The Spur. To speed up the advance of Company E, the battalion commander also asked for tank support and ordered Company G to move up to the Right Tit, ready for use when needed.

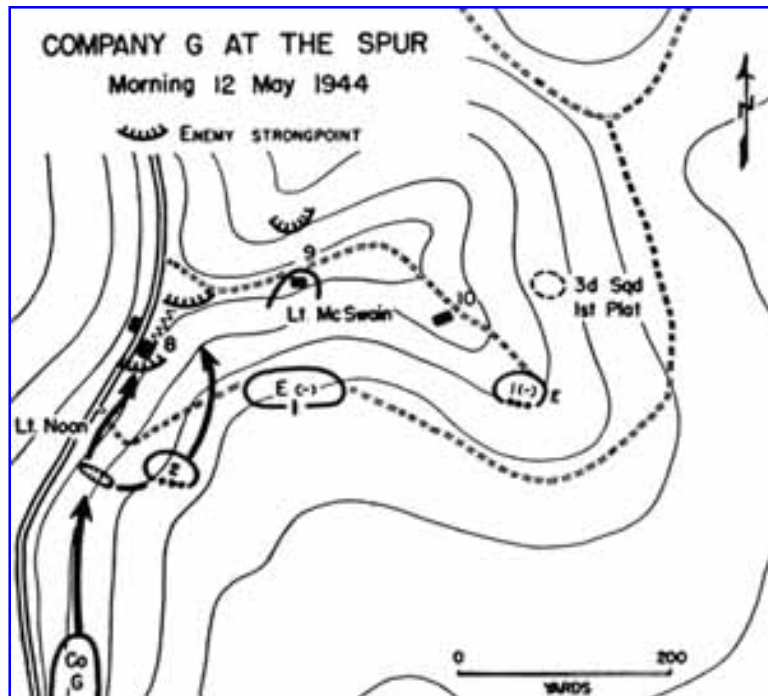
After blasting a path through a barbed-wire entanglement with a bangalore torpedo, Lieutenant McSwain led the men over the Tit toward the road. Crossing the draw beyond the Tit, the group hacked its way through more barbed wire, and in the face of heavy artillery and mortar fire pushed on without respite to a point just below the westernmost turn of the sunken road on The Spur. There the mortar fire increased, and a stream of hand grenades and flares poured down on them from the western end of The Spur's crest. As the flares lit up the area, machine guns opened up from houses and dugouts near the crest on both flanks, inflicting many casualties on Company E.

Elements of the 2d Platoon, about 150 yards farther to the east on the slope above the sunken road, were also pinned down. They were joined by Lieutenant McSwain, acting company commander.

In the face of this heavy fire, all the elements of Company E except the 1st Platoon (isolated at the east end of The Spur) dug in along the forward slope, above and below the sunken road. Tech/Sgt. Theodore J. Kerey of the 4th Platoon reported the grave situation to Colonel Kendall, who was located 50 yards to the rear with a command group of wiremen, radio operators, and liaison officers. From this report Colonel Kendall realized that taking The Spur would require the reduction of enemy strongpoints on the crest. It was soon discovered that this would be no easy undertaking: the Germans were installed in cleverly concealed and well-constructed emplacements. As found later, there were at least 4 strongpoints, with an estimated 12 machine guns. Three of these positions were in houses 8, 9, and 10 along the crest of The Spur; the other was a dugout between the two westernmost houses. In these covered fortifications, machine guns with overlapping fields of fire completely commanded the forward slope of The Spur. Approaches around the eastern extremity were also covered ([Map No. 12](#)).

Using the only effective means at hand, Colonel Kendall set out to bring direct fire on these positions. He sent one squad from Company E, led by an officer, over to wipe out the machine-gun nest at the west end of The Spur's crest. In order to rush the emplacement the men of this squad had to climb over a terrace on the forward slope. As they came into view over the terrace, the German machine gunners opened up with a murderous fire, mowing down nine men. Only the officer and two men got back alive.

While the western position was under attack, Colonel Kendall led a small command group and a handful of men from the 2d and 4th Platoons against a machine-gun emplacement in house No. 9. Advancing from the sunken road where he left the bulk of Company E, the battalion commander moved up the forward slope of The Spur, urging his men forward by injunction and example. Before rushing the machine-gun nest, he built up his maximum squad fire power and himself shot every weapon he could lay his hands on. Grabbing a BAR from a soldier who was not using it, Colonel Kendall emptied it at the machine-gun emplacement in the house. He then successively fired a carbine until he had used up all its ammunition, an M-1 rifle, and antitank rifle grenades. After that he seized a bazooka (rocket launcher), which was being loaded by an artillery observer, and directed three rounds at the pillbox. The first two shots sailed over the target, but the third struck it squarely. He then sent three men around the house to envelop the position. They did not go far before machine-gun fire pinned them down in a shell crater on top of The Spur. Meanwhile, calling on his other men to follow him, Colonel Kendall rushed toward the house. As he approached it, he stood up and threw two grenades at the enemy machine gunners, killing some of them and driving the rest across the top of The Spur to alternate positions about 50 to 100 yards away. Apparently not realizing that by his inspired attack he had almost single-handedly knocked the Germans from their strongpoint, Colonel Kendall pulled his arm back to throw another grenade and jerked out the pin, Crouched in a half-erect position and bending around the corner of the house he made a perfect silhouette in the bright moonlight.



MAP NO. 13

In the last split second before Colonel Kendall tossed the grenade, a machine gun opened up from a position not more than 75 yards away. The bullets struck him full in the face. As he fell to the ground, the grenade exploded against his body.

Colonel Kendall's death, occurring sometime between 0300 and 0330, brought a temporary stop to the attack on the enemy strongpoints. Assuming command of the group which Colonel Kendall had led up the hill, Lieutenant McSwain ordered them to dig in around the house, No. 9, and he posted a handful of men in the building itself. While they were digging in, a machine-gun squad of the 4th Platoon, which had set up in front of the sunken road, opened fire on the men around the house. One burst knocked the shovel from the hands of Sergeant Kerey, who was digging in on the crest. The machine guns got off a few more bursts before Cpl. Joseph Murray, the squad leader, identified the men on the crest as our own troops and stopped the fire.

Company E was in a precarious position. Its men were scattered over The Spur: the remnants of the 1st Platoon, a handful from the 2d and 4th Platoons, and Colonel Kendall's command group were on the crest; and the larger part, consisting of skeleton squads of the 2d, 3d, and 4th Platoons, was dug in against terraces above and below the sunken road. The Germans had not been dislodged from their strongpoints and the effective strength of Company E had been whittled down considerably. During the first eight hours 89 men from the company had been killed or wounded. Its repeated appeals for tank assistance against the pillboxes had apparently gone unanswered.

Actually, Company E's request for tanks had not brought help because the tanks had run into so much opposition they could not reach The Spur. As soon as Colonel Kendall had reached the base of The Spur he had called for armor to blast the machine-gun positions in the houses and bunkers along the road. With that opposition neutralized, Company G and the tanks could move up swiftly and aid the disorganized group on The Spur.

Some hours before this request for tanks the 20-man mine platoon of the Antitank Company, under the command of Capt. Clarence R. Meeks, had gone out, according to the initial plan, to demine the ridge road. Heavy fire from machine guns and snipers near the Tits had forced the platoon into a ditch. A stretch of Teller mines about 75 yards long, located between the Tits, remained untouched.

At 0300, in response to Colonel Kendall's request, five medium tanks from Company C, 760th Tank Battalion under 1st Lt. Eugene E. Gleissner, moved down the Minturno-Santa Maria road. Two of them remained out of the enemy's sight along the step of the stairway curve at the cemetery, while the other three pushed forward. At the Left Tit the leading tank, carrying the platoon leader, was hit by a mine and disabled, and Lieutenant Gleissner was so dazed by the explosion that he returned to the regimental command post. The advance of the armored column came to a standstill.

Spurred by the infantry's calls for assistance, 1st Lt. Paul F. Scholer and 1st Lt. Wilbur R. Crowley, tank liaison officers with the 351st Infantry, went up in a half-track to the stalled vehicles. By dint of their efforts the second tank moved forward. Before advancing more than a few yards it, too, hit a mine which disabled it and injured Lieutenant Scholer, Lieutenant Crowley, and S/Sgt. Pinckney D. Upchurch. The explosion put the tank squarely astride the road, blocking the way to a further advance.

The failure of this second attempt brought Col. Arthur S. Champeny, the regimental commander, up to supervise the tanks and reorganize the attack. The ranking sergeant in the tank detachment refused to try to push forward again, so another sergeant assumed command. He attempted to move the third tank up; this tank hit another mine. It was then about 0500, and Colonel Champeny sent a call to the 88th Division for another platoon of tanks to come up and wipe out the machine-gun nests. The requested reinforcements did not arrive for several hours; meanwhile Company G, which with the aid of the tanks was to have wiped out the enemy's strong positions on The Spur, became pinned down.

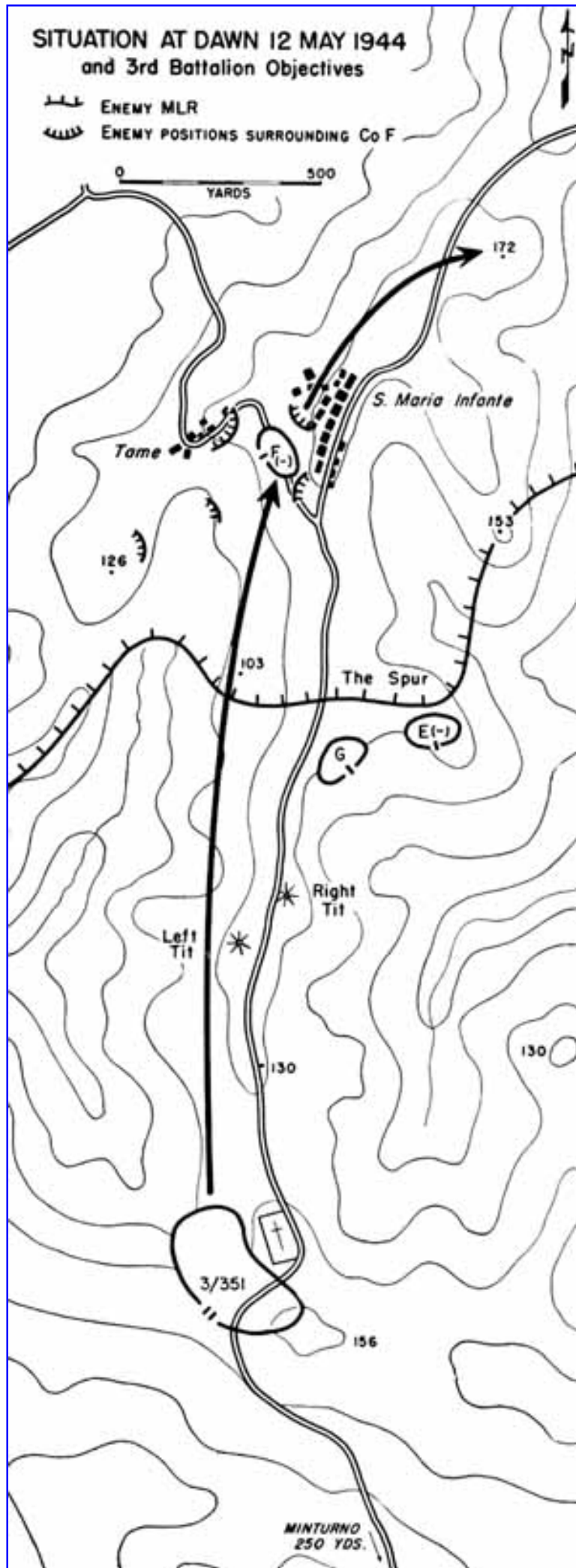
Company G is Stopped at The Spur

At the time Company E reached The Spur, Colonel Champeny had ordered Company G forward from Hill 130 where Colonel Kendall left it in reserve. As soon as Company G, marching single file in a column of platoons, reached the southern base of the Right Tit, a German machine gun opened fire from a bunker near the crest or from across the road on the left. It was another case of a bypassed enemy position reserving its fire for later use against support elements of the 351st. The column stopped and the men jumped in shell holes and flopped behind terraces. Colonel Champeny sent a squad to wipe out the enemy machine gun and Pvt. Harold W. Saager knocked it out with a rifle grenade.

Scarcely had this mission been carried out when Company G received word that Colonel Kendall had been killed and that the tanks were stopped on the road. The company had suffered only light casualties and was ordered forward to assist Company E. As the men pushed down the slope of the Right Tit, the company commander, 1st Lt. Theodore W. Noon, Jr., could see his men as far as 50 yards away in the bright moonlight. With the 1st Platoon leading, Company G reached the southern slope of The Spur near its western end before machinegun fire from house No. 8, dead ahead and close to the road, stopped the advance. Dawn was breaking when Company G reached this point, which was protected from frontal fire by terraces ([Map No. 13](#)).

Lieutenant Noon ordered the 2d Platoon to come up on the left of the 1st Platoon. Trying to advance under heavy machine-gun fire, the 2d Platoon could not get up. As the fire continued, the 1st and 2d Platoons sheltered in a ditch four feet deep and eight yards wide near the westernmost bend of the sunken road. Deciding to reduce the position by a flanking movement, Lieutenant Noon sent the 2d Platoon to the right of the 1st. The 3d Platoon remained in the draw at the base of The Spur where mortars of the 4th Platoon had been set up. Light machine guns were called up but were not able to get in a position from which they could effectively support the attack.

The 2d Platoon moved out from the ditch and around toward the right of the house in a formation of two squads abreast and one in reserve. It managed to cross a couple of terraces and get within 30 yards of the building. There, with only open ground in front of it, the platoon was pinned down by fire from its objective and from another machine gun northeast of the house. Seeing that the 2d Platoon could not advance, Lieutenant Noon decided to assault this position himself. Followed by two enlisted men, he crawled out of the trench where the 1st Platoon was crouched. As the attacking party advanced, the machine gun under attack fired high, but Germans in a communication trench which ran from the house to other machine-gun positions on The Spur killed the two enlisted men. Lieutenant Noon's luck held out. Closing in on the house, he knocked out the machine gun with a hand grenade and pistol fire and then returned to the ditch.



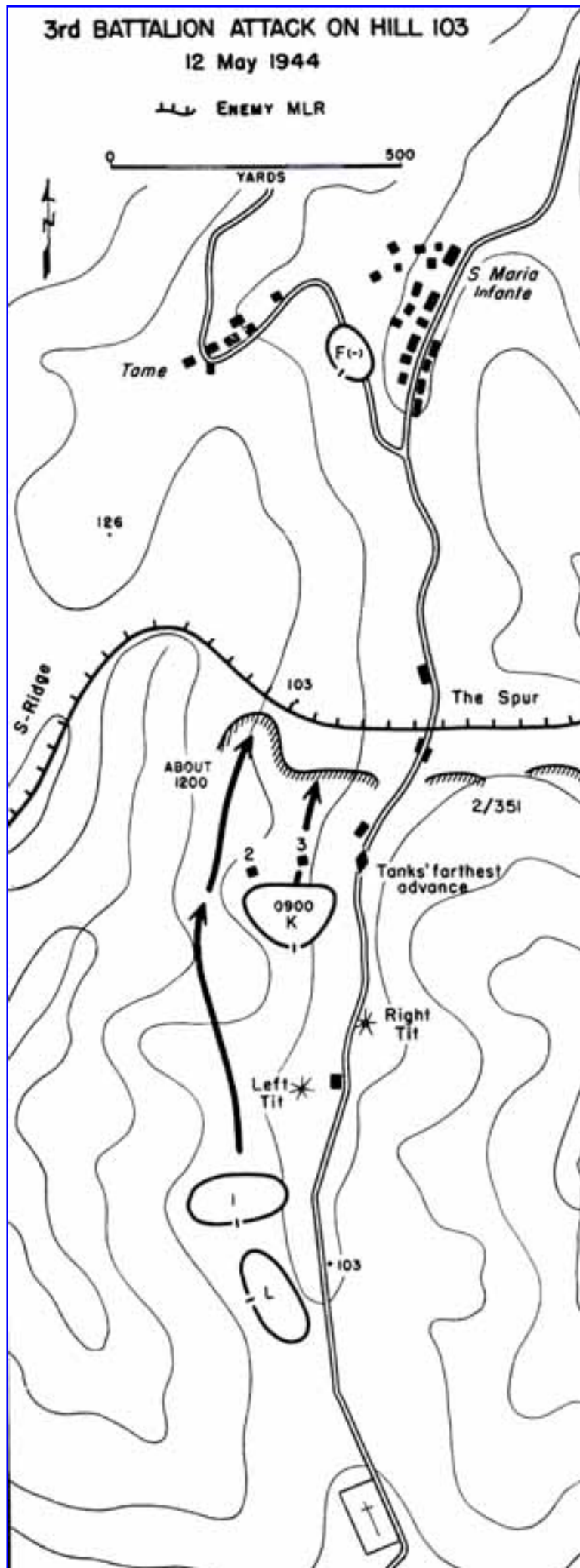
MAP NO. 14

Despite this success Company G continued to be held down by heavy machinegun and sniper fire from other enemy positions on the crest of The Spur. At about 0700, the daring action of S/Sgt. Richard G. Brine removed some of the active Germans. Several enemy snipers had been causing trouble from the same house where Lieutenant Noon had knocked out the machine gun. Sergeant Brine and two other men crawled forward to deal with the snipers. Both of the men with Sergeant Brine were severely wounded by machine guns which opened up on the right and left of the snipers' position. Under this heavy fire Sergeant Brine kept firing on the snipers, killing several and forcing the remainder to withdraw. Observing that the company was now under fire from the machine guns on either side of the house and that the Weapons Platoon was pinned down in the open and suffering heavy losses, he crawled into an opening in the rear of the building from which vantage point he fired his rifle at both the machine guns. This action drew the enemy's fire and allowed the Weapons Platoon to take cover.

In spite of the heroic efforts of many men, the night attack of the 2d Battalion had not achieved any of its objectives. On the battalion left, elements of Company F had advanced almost to its objective at the culvert, but were there pinned down and en

circled by enemy forces. The battalion's greatest danger was that its left flank was exposed: on the west slopes of the central ridge, no effective strength remained between the surrounded Company F force and the cemetery. During the night, troops of the 338th Infantry had driven across the crest of Hill 131 into the village of Solacciano, but were pushed back to the base of the S-Ridge. With the German main line of resistance there still intact, machine guns on the crest and eastern slope of the S-Ridge could bring devastating fire on the Minturno-Santa Maria road and all routes of approach to Company F's beleaguered group at the culvert.

On the right of the ridge road to Santa Maria, things were not much better. By 0900 Company G, which had attempted to wipe out resistance and relieve Company E, had been able to move only one-third of the way up the southern slope of The Spur, where it was dug in against the side of a terrace. Those few men who got north of the sunken road had to withdraw in the face of heavy enemy fire; all the platoons of the company had suffered casualties and were in some confusion. Elements of Company E were still dug in on the crest of The Spur, over 1,500 yards beyond the line of departure, but these men could not move. The bulk of that company was pinned down on the forward slope, and the company had suffered so many casualties that its effective strength was insufficient to regain the initiative. Although the efforts of both companies on the battalion's right flank had reduced some enemy positions, those which remained were strong enough to frustrate further advance.



MAP NO. 15

The 3d Battalion is Stopped at Hill 103 (12 May)

To carry on the unfinished mission of the weakened and helpless 2d Battalion, the 3d Battalion, under Maj. Charles P. Furr, was ordered forward by Colonel Champeny at 0420. This fresh unit was to break through to the remnants of Company F at the culvert near Tame, pass through them, and envelop Santa Maria from the left flank by seizing the high ground north of the town. Four companies would be used to overcome the positions that had impeded the advance of Company F ([Map No. 14](#)).

Starting at dawn, the 3d Battalion, in two columns 25-30 yards apart, turned off the road just west of the cemetery and followed the tapeline laid down by Company F. Company K led off, marching in a box formation with the 1st and 2d Platoons abreast, each in single file, followed by the 3d and the Weapons Platoons. As the ridgeline rose toward Hill 130, Major Furr held up Companies I and L and ordered Company K to move forward to the Left Tit. Company K stopped just behind the first rise and Company L halted in the saddle south of it.

Moving west of the road, Company K (less the mortar section which was left in defiladed positions in the saddle) advanced across the Left Tit without meeting resistance ([Map No. 15](#)). It reached a little knoll between the Left Tit and Hill 103 before being stopped by machine-gun fire. Snipers and at least three machine guns to the left, right, and immediate front of the 2d Platoon halted it just south of house No. 2 at 0900. For over two hours the 2d Platoon stayed there. During the halt it deployed in a staggered line and built up defensive positions to the left flank of the 1st Platoon, which was on the company's right. Fire from another house, No. 3, stopped the 1st Platoon. The 3d Squad was sent out to wipe out the position, and their fire forced the Germans to withdraw (as events later proved) to an alternate position down the slope of the little knoll.

Major Furr ordered Company I, under Capt. Glenn H. Erickson, to come up on the left flank to help Company K push forward. While Company K, with its right flank on the road, made a frontal assault on Hill 103, Company I would envelop the enemy positions from the west. Each company was to attack in formation of two rifle platoons abreast and one in support. The Weapons Platoon would support the attack from the crest and southern slope of the little knoll. Company L was still in reserve. Company M's machine guns were ordered to displace forward to the knoll, there to support the attack by fire on Hill 103 and the S-Ridge. One section of heavy machine guns set up west of house No. 2, the other section moved forward and set up behind Company K.

About 1115 Companies K and I jumped off toward Hill 103. On the battalion right flank the 1st Platoon of Company K—its three squads abreast and deployed in a skirmish line—pushed down the northern slope of the knoll in the face of heavy machine-gun fire from the S-Ridge as well as from the forward slope of Hill 103. On the platoon's left, the 2d Squad advanced under partial cover of terraces across the draw and a short distance up the southern slope of Hill 103, where it was stopped by machine-gun fire from the crest and from the rear. The 1st and 3d Squads on the right could advance only to the draw at the base of the hill before fire pinned them down.

On the left the 2d Platoon of Company K pushed on down the knoll to the draw south of Hill 103). Hardly had the platoon reached the draw when a machine gun on the northern slope of the knoll started firing on the platoon from the right rear, forcing the men to seek cover. The Germans who had been driven out of the house near the road by the 1st Platoon had waited until both platoons got past them before they began to fire. Machine guns on Hill 103 and the S-Ridge sprayed the area where the men of Company K hugged the ground. Well-placed snipers on Hill 103 also trained their rifles on Company K.

In visual contact with Company K and on its left, the two leading assault platoons of Company I moved up the western slope of Hill 103 a few yards beyond the farthest advance of Company K; then, enemy fire from mortars, artillery, and machine guns halted their attack. Company I's 3d Platoon was in a very exposed spot near the western base of Hill 103, receiving casualties from two machine guns and a few riflemen. Only the resourceful action of Pvt. Walker C. Lopez enabled the platoon to reach positions sheltered from enemy fire. Taking a BAR from an automatic rifleman who had been so severely wounded that he could not operate his weapon, Private Lopez, though not a member of the BAR team, crawled forward about 20 yards. From a position which was in full view of the enemy, but which offered good observation, he fired so effectively that both machine guns were silenced. Freed from the menace of this fire, the platoon then maneuvered into covered positions. The 1st Platoon, Company I, advancing on the right, also reached the western slope of Hill 103 and suffered much heavier casualties than the other assault platoon. By the time the platoon reached Hill 103 it had barely the strength of one squad.

Half an hour after both companies had begun their attack against Hill 103 they were stopped cold. For the rest of the day Companies K and I remained dug in at the base and on the lower slope of Hill 103, where they had to depend on the inadequate cover provided by shallow ditches and shellholes. Their only action the rest of the day was to put bazooka and small-arms fire at enemy positions on Hill 103 and the S-Ridge. The supporting fire of mortars, artillery, tanks, and tank destroyers had proved disappointing during the 3d Battalion's attack. Enemy pillboxes in the Santa Maria-Mt. Bracchi-Pulcherini area were not appreciably weakened by fire from all these weapons in the morning of 12 May.

The armored support was held up by problems of mine clearance, swampy terrain, and poor visibility. The mine platoon of the Antitank Company, which had failed in its mission due to enemy fire, had been able to come out of its shelter at about 0600 and had begun removing the mines in the road between the Tits and The Spur. When the morning haze lifted, toward noon, a platoon of five tanks got underway and advanced to a point beyond the Tits. With 1st Lt. Filmore W. McAbee, liaison officer, riding in the tank and pointing out targets along the road, the platoon knocked out two machinegun nests. Before the action was over, however, the enemy inflicted heavy damage on the armored column, putting three of our tanks out of action.

Another tank effort was made along the road in the afternoon. At 1500, after being held up by mud at a culvert, one platoon of Company A, 760th Tank Battalion, commanded by 1st Lt. Clinton F. Des Jardins, cleared the way and moved down the road toward Santa Maria. Advancing past the Minturno cemetery it drew up just short of the Tits at 15 45. With the assistance of infantrymen who crawled up to the tanks and pointed out the strongpoints along the road, the tanks went on beyond the Right Tit and knocked out an enemy self-propelled gun as well as approximately 20 sniper and machine-gun positions. After moving a few yards farther down the road toward The Spur, Lieutenant Des Jardins' tank was hit by an armor-piercing shell from another German self-propelled gun. As it started to burn, the crew jumped out and hid in a nearby wall where they remained for more than 24 hours until they were picked up by troops of the 351st Infantry. Two more tanks were put out of action and the rest pulled back behind the cemetery.

On the right flank of the 351st Infantry another group of tanks tried to reach Santa Maria. Under an order from the 88th Division, tanks from Company B, 760th Tank Battalion were to move from Tufo Ridge to Hills 132 and 130, follow the jeep trail down the slope to the draw in front of Pulcherini, cross Reali Creek, and fan out in the direction of Mount Cerreto, Pulcherini, and the high ground east and north of Santa Maria. Starting out from an assembly area near Tufo, Company B moved forward only a short distance before it bogged down in a marshy area north of the town.

Capture of Company F (12 May)

All through the day of the 12th, Company F at the culvert was in a state of siege. From all sides mortar, artillery, and machinegun fire fell near the group dug in around the culvert. Air bursts splattered the area. A mortar, tucked away in a haystack on the eastern slope of Hill 126, lobbed shells near the culvert. From Santa Maria and the S-Ridge, machine guns kept up harassing fire on Company F; from the rear along the Minturno-Santa Maria road, other automatic weapons were trained on our embattled troops; and German snipers in the creek bed took pot shots whenever a head poked above a fox hole or the slightest movement was detected around the culvert.

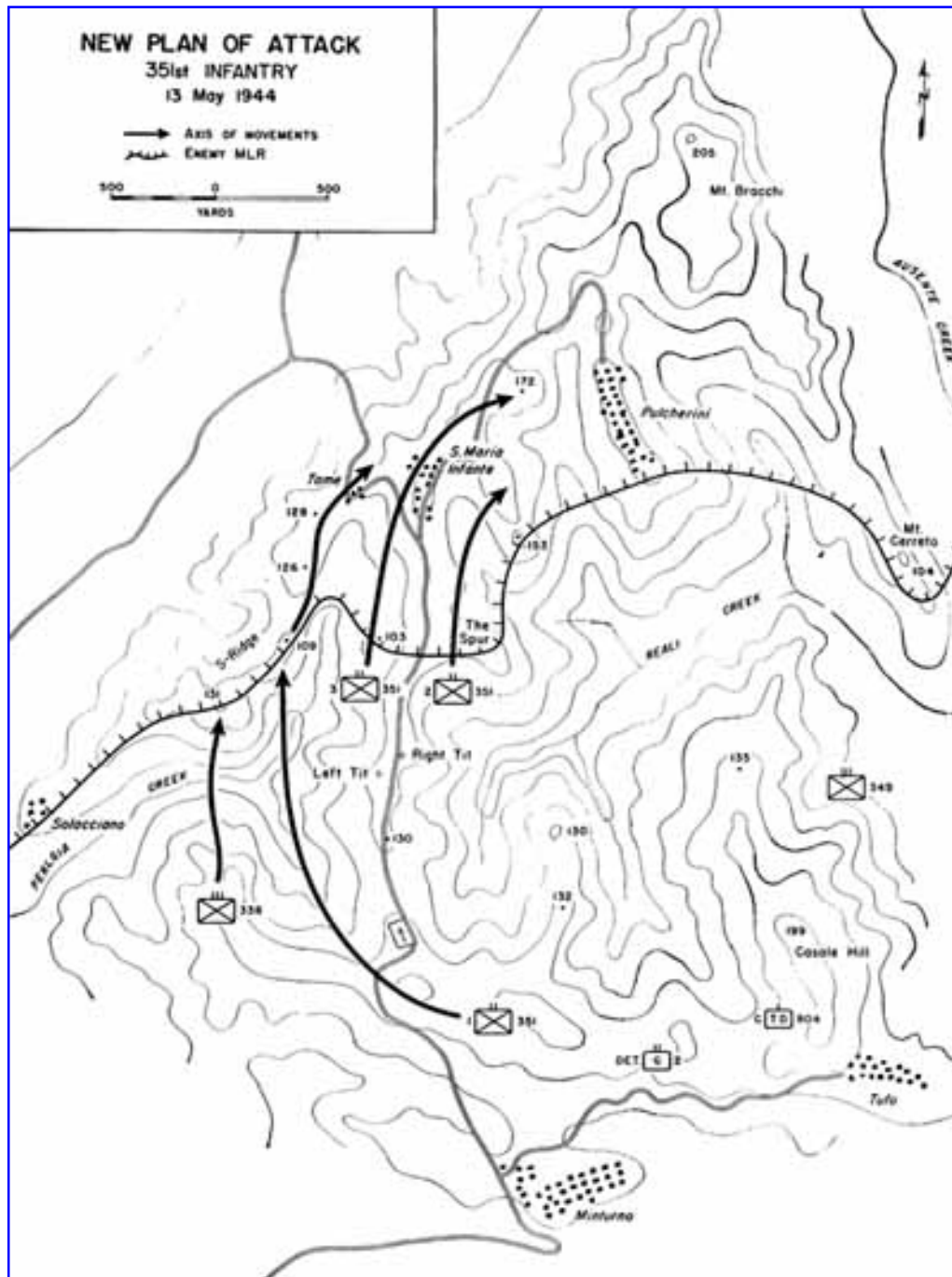
The heaviest fire came from Tame. Machine gunners and snipers in the hamlet, less than 200 yards away, fired at the culvert and the half-circle of fox holes around it. The men of Company F fired back, but their force was small and their ammunition stocks dwindling. During the afternoon enemy tanks added to Company F's troubles. They came along the Spigno road to Tame, from which they harassed Company F with point-blank fire. Our artillery finally dispersed them, knocking out two.

Communication between Company F and the 2d Battalion was maintained by Capt. Edward J. Church, commanding Company H, who operated an SCR 300 on Hill 130, 800 yards west of the Minturno-Santa Maria road. But after dawn on 12 May, only four radio messages were received from Company F. Since morning the Company's situation had seriously deteriorated. It was hemmed in on all sides and pressed into a tiny pocket. Food and ammunition were running low, and litter bearers were sorely needed to evacuate the wounded. If the feeble batteries of the company's SCR 300 went out the sole means of communication with the battalion would be cut off.

During the last conversation, at 2015, Captain Church relayed an order from Maj. Edwin L. Shull, acting battalion commander, which directed Captain Nelson to withdraw the company under cover of darkness to the assembly area behind Cemetery Ridge. When he heard the order, Captain Nelson expressed his doubts that it could be carried out, and reiterated his company's plight. Somebody had better do something. I have lots of casualties. I need supplies." A moment later Company F tried to get through again, but what came over the air was unintelligible. Men who were with Company F at the time stated later that Captain Nelson had declared he would bring Company F back to Cemetery Ridge that night.

If that was his intention, the enemy never allowed him to carry it out. After sunset, six Germans came across the Tame-Santa Maria road, a few yards southeast of the inverted V-bend, calling "Kamerad." As the men of Company F scrambled from fox holes and the culvert to capture them, other Germans closed in from all sides. Some rushed from the draw east of Hill 126, others from the Y-Junction across the slope on the left-hand side of the road; most of them came straight down the road from Tame around the inverted V-bend. As the Germans spilled out of their hiding places and streamed down on Company F, one of our machine gunners let loose a short, harmless burst before an officer ordered him to cease firing. Company F and half a platoon from Company H surrendered without further struggle. The only ones to escape were five enlisted men who played dead in their fox holes and were picked up by the 3d Battalion on the morning of 14 May. The enemy's bag of prisoners included the 2d Battalion S-2, 4 officers and about 60 enlisted men from Company F, a Cannon Company liaison officer, and 1 officer and approximately 20 men from Company H. The capture was as swift as it was unexpected: it took exactly five minutes.

The 3d Battalion's failure to move beyond Hill 103 and rescue Company F was partly due to the lack of progress by adjacent units. The tanks had not completely wiped out the enemy on the 3d Battalion's right flank, and the S-Ridge was still in enemy hands. This key terrain had been assaulted again and again during 12 May, but the enemy inflicted such losses on the 338th Infantry that it gained little ground. By the afternoon of 13 May the 338th Infantry had suffered 50 percent casualties.



MAP NO. 16



THE BARE SLOPES OF THE S-RIDGE gave little cover for troops of the 351st attacking from the creek valley (left). This view, taken from the northeast on the Minturno-Santa Maria road, looks across the S-Ridge to the Tyrrhenian Sea in the background.

During the night of 12/13 May the resumption of the offensive was postponed. The 88th Division had received information at noon on 12 May that a major counterattack was forming for that night, preceded by a minor one during the last hour of daylight. To meet the threat the 351st Infantry was alerted, and the 913th Field Artillery Battalion was ordered to adjust fire on the enemy. The artillery fire failed to upset the enemy plan of attack, and it was only after stiff fighting that the 3d Battalion managed to beat off the waves of enemy infantry. On the other side of the Minturno-Santa Maria road, tank destroyers firing from Tufo Ridge tried to soften up the enemy positions along the crest of The Spur, without success.

Fresh troops and supplies were urgently needed to reinforce the depleted 2d and 3d Battalions. In the 2d Battalion, Company F had ceased to exist; Companies E and G had lost so many killed and wounded that they were about half their original size. The 3d Battalion's assaulting companies, K and 1, had fared little better. Altogether the regiment had sustained 361 casualties during 11-12 May, including 68 killed, 191 wounded, and 92 missing in action. During the night 125 replacements, who had been trained by the regiment, were sent up to the rifle companies with guides. This intended relief turned out to be a minor catastrophe. Many of the new men were killed or wounded by enemy fire on the way; others straggled or took shelter in shell holes; only a few reached the forward positions.

Evacuating the wounded and bringing up supplies under heavy and constant shellfire were dangerous operations. Of 60 Italian civilian carriers used in the Santa Maria battle, 23 were killed. Ammunition and rations were brought by jeep from the regimental dump east of Minturno to the battalion dumps established along the Santa Maria road. From these points battalion ammunition and pioneer platoons and the Italian civilians packed the supplies up to the frontline troops.

Three regular litter teams from each battalion and the cooks from the company kitchens did yeoman service in bearing the wounded back to evacuation points south of the Tits. There jeep ambulances, which could take four litter cases each, picked them up and delivered them post haste to battalion aid stations.

Poor communications among units of the 351st Infantry were still causing trouble for the attacking forces. Keeping contact proved a hard task both day and night, with mechanical difficulties and hill contours interfering with transmission and reception of the 536 radios. The new SCR 300 radio, however, used in company, battalion, and regimental headquarters stood up well under the most trying combat conditions. Mortar and artillery fire wreaked havoc with the telephone lines. Although wiremen, creeping and crawling to escape small-arms fire, laid as many as 12 lines, they were never able to keep more than 5 in operation at one time. Frequently all of them were out of commission. jeeps carried the wire up the Minturno-Santa Maria road as far as possible; the rest of the way it was laid by hand. Messengers, who were used when other means failed, found the going tough at all times,

Plans for Renewed Attack (13 May)

The failure to reach Santa Maria after repeated efforts during 11-12 May necessitated new plans for a coordinated attack ([Map No. 16](#), page 156). At 1100, 13 May the commanding generals of the 88th and 85th Divisions, with their subordinate commanders, Colonel Champeny of the 351st and Col. Fred A. Safay of the 338th Infantry, met at the 88th Division CP in Minturno to draw up plans. They decided that the 338th and 351st Infantry would again attack simultaneously against the twin objectives, the S-Ridge and Santa Maria. But because the 338th Infantry had been so weakened in its attack against the stubbornly held S-Ridge, fresh troops from the 351st Infantry would take responsibility for seizing a part of this key ridge, and the divisional boundaries were shifted west to place Hills 109, 126, and 128 in the zone of the 351st.

Under this plan the 351st Infantry would make thrusts on each side of the ridge road to take the high ground east and north of Santa Maria. In addition it would drive the Germans from the S-Ridge at Hill 109, then swing north on that ridge line and take Hills 126, 128, and Tame. The 338th Infantry on the left would push across the S-Ridge to seize Hill 131. The 351st Infantry's right boundary was shifted to the west so that the 349th Infantry could take over the zone of the 1st Battalion, 351st Infantry, which would be used to attack the S-Ridge.

Colonel Champeny drew up an assault plan for the 351st Infantry which provided for use of all three battalions. The 2d and 3d Battalions would push forward from their positions on each side of the ridge road, with their left flank protected by the 1st Battalion's attack against the S-Ridge.

From their hard-won fox holes on The Spur, Company E on the left and Company G on the right would advance across the crest and around the eastern edge of the hill, follow the slope along the east side of the road, and take the high ground east of Santa Maria. At the same time Companies I and L, jumping off from the forward slope of Hill 103, would move along the western side of the road and seize the high ground north of the town. The 1st Battalion was to advance from the draw between the S-Ridge and the high ground along the road, take Hill 109, then swing north on the S-Ridge to Tame.

Enemy positions were softened up before the attack. At 1225 three American fighter-bombers dropped six or seven bombs on Santa Maria and strafed enemy positions in the town. A few minutes later, 3 of 22 attacking FW-190's broke through a cordon of Spitfires and P-40's to drop a few bombs between The Spur and Minturno. The only one that caused damage hit the 3d Battalion aid station on the trail back of Cemetery Ridge, wounding several men. Although not without harassing and morale value, neither the German nor the American air attacks substantially influenced the course of the battle for Santa Maria.

At 1415, tank destroyers from Tufo Ridge and Casale Hill opened up on the dugouts and houses on The Spur. This fire fell uncomfortably close to Company E, but because of its effectiveness it was continued for 45 minutes. Using information furnished by Capt. Gilmer M. Heitman, Jr., 2d Battalion adjutant who had located the enemy strongpoints, and relying on .50-cal. tracers to identify them, the tank destroyers scored two or perhaps three direct hits on the targets. To cover the attack of the 351st Infantry, the 2d Chemical Battalion and the 913th Field Artillery Battalion, assisted by the corps artillery, laid down a preparation of several hundred rounds of smoke, white phosphorus, and high explosive shells on Santa Maria and Pulcherini. The concentrations began at 1825; they were heavy and properly placed.

The time for the attack of the 338th Infantry and the 351st Infantry was originally set for 1600. As the 1st Battalion could not reach its jump-off position in time, Colonel Champeny requested the commander of the 88th Division to postpone the attack half an hour. Even this stay was not sufficient and Colonel Champeny then asked that the time for the attack be pushed back to 1830. The request was granted, but the delay was to apply only to the 351st Infantry. On the left flank the 338th Infantry was to jump off at 1630, in accordance with the original half-hour postponement.

The eastern positions on the crest of The Spur would be attacked by Company G. From its dug-in positions along the sunken road, Company G would wheel past Company E toward the eastern end of The Spur, then cut back sharply along the crest. Occupying positions on the crest, Company G would wait until it got word to push on into Santa Maria.

Company E, attacking at the same time, would move out from the sunken road over the western end of The Spur, knock out the machine-gun nests there, and take the high ground east of Santa Maria. Although the two units were operating close to each other, various difficulties, including failure to get word of the postponed hour of attack, were to upset the coordination of the 2d Battalion attack.

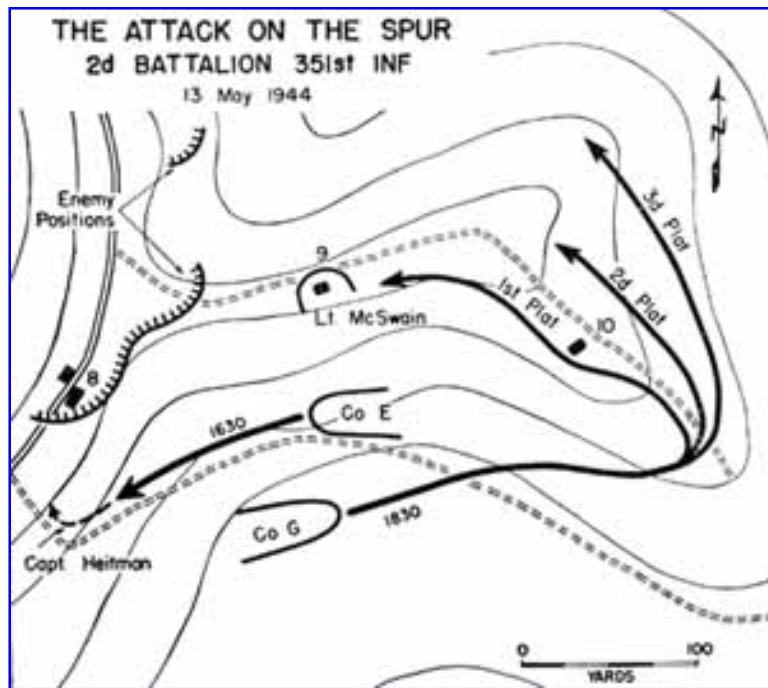
The Enemy Holds Out on The Spur (13 May)

Company G received its orders to attack sufficiently ahead of time to allow a brief reconnaissance of its objectives. At about 1530 Lieutenant Noon, the company commander, and his officers went around the eastern extremity of The Spur. No sooner had they reached the reverse slope than they were caught in a heavy mortar barrage. Lieutenant Noon, in advance of the other officers, was wounded severely in both legs. His fellow officers were unable to reach him and returned to the company to launch the attack at 1630.

The company moved out in a column of platoons, 3d, 1st, 2d, and 4th in that order, from its dug-in positions one-third of the way up the forward slope of The Spur ([Map No. 17](#)). After double-timing to the eastern slope, Company G changed its formation to two rifle platoons abreast and forward, and one in the rear, each platoon deployed in a wedge with two squads forward and one in support. When fire was first received, the forward squads in the platoons built up in a skirmish line. The mortar section of the Weapons Platoon supported the attack from defiladed positions in the draw south of The Spur, and the machine-gun section followed the 1st Platoon at supporting distance.

The 3d Platoon on the right advanced across the eastern prong of The Spur and then half way over the northern slope toward the road. Here it was pinned down by machine-gun fire from positions at the western end of the crest. On the left of the 3d Platoon, the 1st had cut straight up along the crest of the eastern slope. Almost to the top, the 1st Platoon was stopped by machinegun fire from the same positions that checked the advance of the 3d Platoon. Just ahead of the 1st Platoon was a little dip in the ground at the eastern end of the crest. Every time the men stuck their heads over the edge of the dip, grazing machine-gun fire met them.

Having lost contact with the 3d Platoon on the right, 1st Lt. William G. Hohenadel, 1st Platoon leader, called up the 2d Platoon, which moved up swiftly on the right of the 1st Platoon. It came under the machine-gun fire covering the backbone of The Spur. Unable to advance frontally across the little dip (where the 2d Platoon dug in), the 1st Platoon swung to the left and fired on some men it saw in fox holes around house No. 9 whom it took to be Germans. The presumed enemy was the group from Company E, under Lieutenant McSwain, who had dug in near house No. 9 after Colonel Kendall was killed.



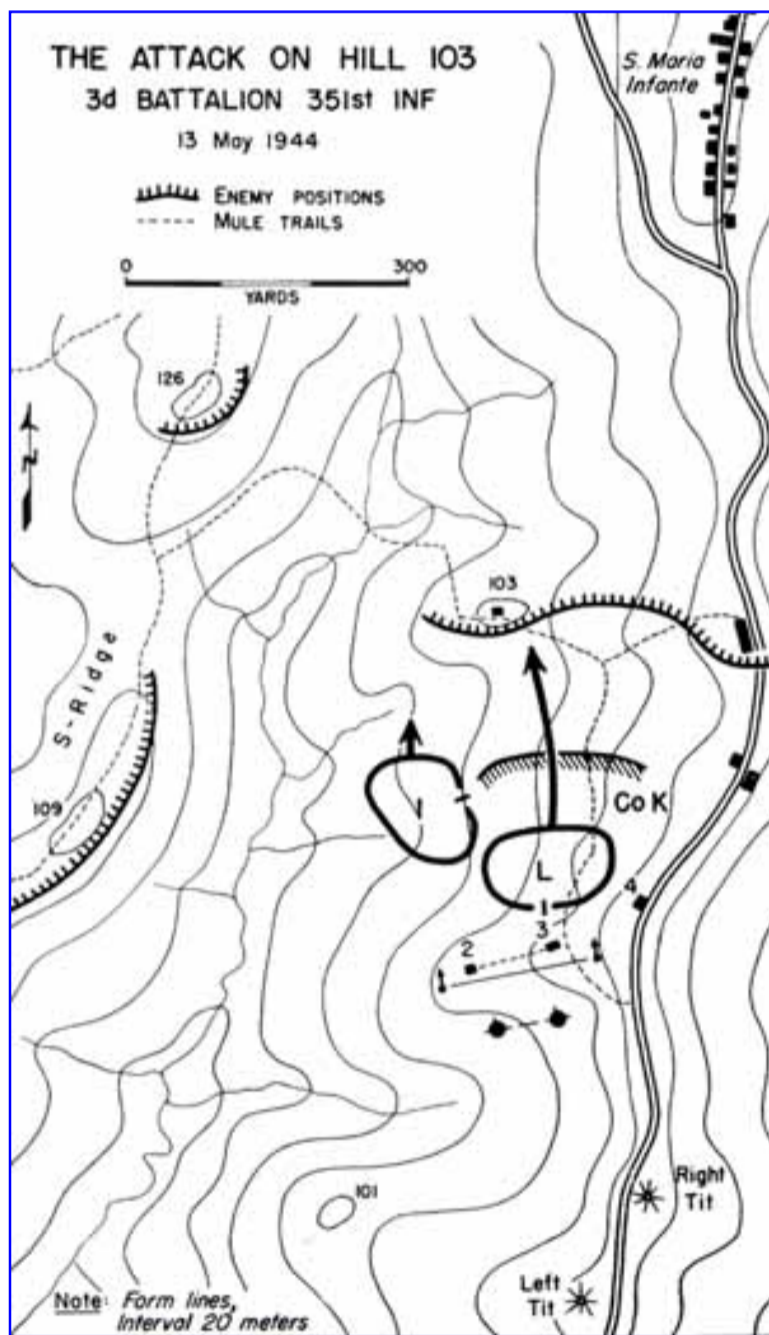
MAP NO. 17

These men had received orders to join the rest of Company E at the sunken road and were trying to do so when caught in the mistaken fire from Company G. To stop this fire 1st Lt. Pat G. Combs, artillery liaison officer with McSwain's group, held up his helmet on a rifle. When the 1st Platoon continued to take pot shots at him, he stood upright. The men from Company G then recognized him and ceased firing, though not before they had seriously wounded Lieutenant McSwain.

After the Company E men, who had held out on the crest of The Spur for a day and a half, rolled and crawled down to their comrades at the sunken road, the 1st Platoon, Company G dug in around house No. 9. Farther to the east, the 2d Platoon was dug in at the military crest on the end of The Spur. The 3d Platoon had dug in on the northern slope.

On the 2d Battalion's left flank, Company E had even less success than Company G. At 1530, Captain Heitman, now in command of Company E, received an order from Colonel Champeny over the SCR 300 radio, giving the plan of the company attack with the jump-off time as 1630. Receiving no word of the postponement to 1830, Captain Heitman began his attack at 1630, not waiting for Lieutenant McSwain's group on the crest who had been ordered to join the company at the sunken road. Captain Heitman led the men from their dug-in positions west along the road in single file. After moving toward the central ridge a few yards beyond a bend in the road, Captain Heitman, at the head of the column, cut back sharply toward the immediate objectives of Company E, the German machine-gun nest on the western end of The Spur's crest. As soon as Captain Heitman and Pfc. Earl R. Baish and Joseph C. Stockmal following just behind him turned off from the sunken road, they came under heavy fire from the machine guns on the crest. At the sound of the fire, the rest of Company E, which had not yet rounded the bend, stopped dead in its tracks.

The two leading men and Captain Heitman jumped into a ditch that crossed the sunken road. From the direction of the machine-gun fire, Heitman located the enemy position and threw three grenades at it. In response German machine guns opened up from new positions on the crest at the men in the ditch, forcing Captain Heitman and Privates Baish and Stockmal to dig in against a 4-foot bank below the sunken road. Captain Heitman then crawled up to the bank and with single shots picked off three men who were manning one machine gun while other Germans from the same or nearby positions heaved grenade after grenade at the group. Only one of the grenades struck home, but it hit all three men. Although wounded the men were still able to move. At about 1800, after locating at least three enemy machinegun nests, they crawled back down the sunken trail to where the rest of Company E had stopped. Captain Heitman then reported the location of the enemy strongpoints to Major Shull, the acting battalion commander, who ordered him to hold fast until the next morning. Although some positions on The Spur had been knocked out by the well-directed fire from tank destroyers, positions still held by the enemy at the western end prevented further attack by the 2d Battalion on 13 May.



MAP NO. 18

other machine guns on the right and left flanks. The men stayed where they were and waited for the 1st Platoon to come up and join them. As darkness came on and the reinforcements did not show up, Sergeant Loterbaugh ordered his platoon, which had suffered many casualties, to withdraw to the lower part of the southern slope below the first terrace, just in front of the line where Company K was dug in.

On the left, the 3d Platoon had also been stopped near the crest, in the cross fire of automatic weapons. One of the machine guns was located in a house near the crest. Sizing up the situation, Pvts. Henry Dombrowski and Richard Zippel crawled forward toward the enemy gun. As they entered the building, two Germans fired on them with machine pistols, one of the shots wounding Zippel. Undaunted they both charged, killed the Germans with rifle fire, and put the machine gun out of action. Although this action removed one of the troublesome guns, the 3d Platoon found its situation on the bare crest untenable and withdrew at dark down the southern slope of Hill 103.

Company I's attempt to flank Hill 103 around the left was abortive. The heavy concentration of German artillery fire south of Hill 103 at jump-off time prevented the men from moving out as scheduled. Continuing for several hours, the barrage made it extremely hazardous to move. When the men did get going, machine-gun and mortar fire, some coming from Hill 103, but principally from the S-Ridge, forced Company I to abandon its advance for the night.

Enemy artillery fire, as well as the machine guns and mortars on Hill 103 and the S-Ridge, had caused many casualties in the 3d Battalion. Company K, which had received much of the artillery fire at its supporting position south of Hill 103, was down to one-half its original strength. Company I was at two-thirds strength and Company L had lost many men from its rifle platoons. Just before midnight Capt. Howard E. Miller, the 3d Battalion S-3, reported, "I just saw two years of training go up in smoke—my men—about half of them—almost all the leaders." Part of the failure of the 3d Battalion attack was due to the slow progress on the left flank, where coordination troubles between the 1st Battalion and the 338th Infantry prevented the swift accomplishment of the vital mission of capturing the S-Ridge.

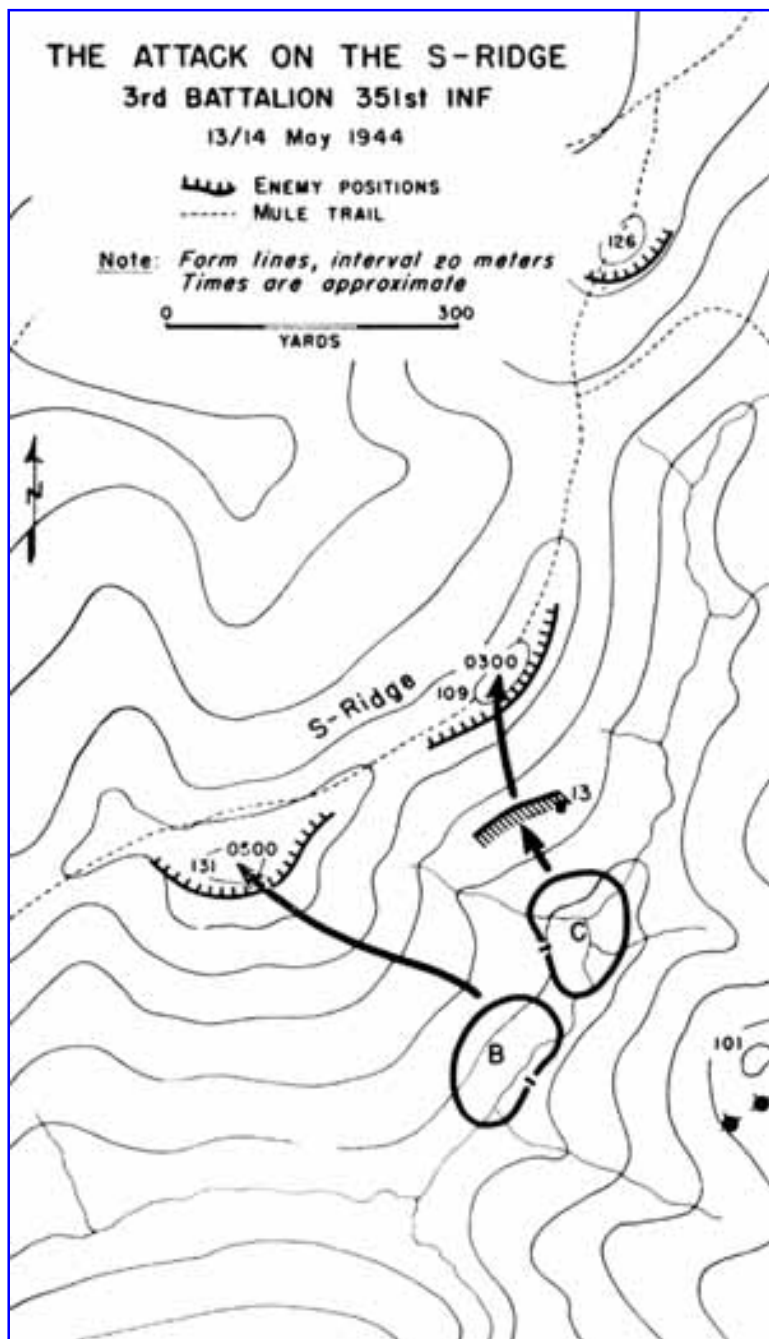
1st Battalion Gains at the S-Ridge

The 2d and 3d Battalions had jumped off immediately to the front of their forward positions, but the 1st Battalion had to move a long distance forward from the center of Cemetery Ridge to be in position for its attack against the S-Ridge. Consequently the attack on the 351st Infantry's left wing got off to a much slower start than had been hoped for. Difficulties of coordination with the 338th Infantry, attacking the southernmost knob of the S-Ridge at a different time, also upset the 1st Battalion's attack. In addition, enemy fire separated the battalion commander from his unit before the jump-off and held up the troops before they reached their jump-off position ([Map No. 19](#)).

After receiving the regimental attack order at noon on 13 May, Maj. Harold McV. Brown, 1st Battalion commander, accompanied by the battalion S-3, artillery liaison officer, and heavy weapons company commander, left the battalion CP to reconnoiter his assigned objectives from Mt. Natale, westernmost hill on Cemetery Ridge. His executive officer, Capt. Trevor E. Williams, had assured Major Brown that the battalion would be ready to attack at 1630. In addition to choosing a suitable route of advance, Major Brown planned to coordinate tightly with the 338th Infantry, which was to attack Hill 131 at 1630. After Major Brown's group reached Mt. Natale, they were pinned down by artillery fire. Capt. Herbert D. Shoemaker, the heavy weapons company commander, was killed, and the battalion commander was not able to return to his troops for several hours.

Because of the urgency of the 1st Battalion's mission, Colonel Champeny decided that Captain Williams should lead the attack on schedule without Major Brown. After briefing the company commanders on their mission Captain Williams moved the 1st Battalion out of the assembly area on Cemetery Ridge and down the Minturno-Santa Maria road in a column of companies: C, B, Headquarters, A, and D. As the troops reached the road, tanks passed near them. Coming under the heavy shell fire directed by the enemy at our tanks, the troops of the 1st Battalion suffered some casualties.

After turning off the road, the 1st Battalion waded in a single column through the knee-deep mud and water of the creek bed that lay in the narrow valley between the S-Ridge and the Minturno-Santa Maria road. Companies C and B reached the jump-off point at the base of Hill 109 without incident, but somewhere along the way they lost contact with Company A and the two machine-gun platoons of Company D which had been following them. This rear group wandered to Mt. Natale before 1st Lt. George D. Schaffer, 1st Battalion S-3, found it and led it back to the forward elements of the battalion.



MAP NO. 19

Slowed up by the uncertain footing and the burden of carrying heavy machine guns, the troops of the 1st Battalion moved at such a snail's pace that they could not jump off at the scheduled time and the attack was postponed to 1830. Word had also been received from the battalion commander to delay the attack until he arrived. It was already dark before Major Brown, accompanied by Colonel Champeny, reached the battalion CP in the creek bed east of the S-Ridge. Upon arriving, the battalion commander made a brief reconnaissance, issued attack orders to his company commanders, and gave them a chance to make their own reconnaissance.

Under Major Brown's plan of attack, Company C was to move from the jump-off point in the creek bed straight up Hill 109 to take it by frontal assault. After the 338th Infantry captured Hill 131, Company A would pass through Company C and attack along a mule trail on the S-Ridge crest against knobs 126 and 128 at the northeastern extremity of the S-Ridge. Company B would remain in the creek bed, in reserve. All night the machine-gun platoon of Company D stayed there too, while the heavy mortars were in position behind Hill 101. During the 1st Battalion's attack neither the heavy machine guns nor the 81-mm mortars were fired because, like the lighter weapons of Companies B and C, they could be used only at the risk of inflicting casualties among our own attacking troops.

Company C's objective, Hill 109, like Hill 131 under attack by the 338th Infantry just to the south, was terraced on the upper half of the southeastern slope. The slightly flattened crest of Hill 109 was about 70 yards wide and 300 yards long. Along the southeastern edge lay a minefield and behind it concertina barbed wire. Covering the minefield and the wire were two machine guns emplaced in earthen dugouts. About 50 yards below the concertina wire the terraces began, rising in tiers to the crest. In attacking this difficult objective Company C was hindered by ignorance of the progress of 338th Infantry troops against Hill 131, farther south on the ridge. The 338th had jumped off at 1630, about six and a half hours before Company C was ready to go against Hill 109.

A ten-minute artillery concentration on Hill 109 preceded Company C's jump-off.

After firing only a few rounds, the artillery received a report that its shells were falling on 338th Infantry troops, who, unknown to the 351st Infantry, had dug in about halfway up the southeastern slope of Hill 109. When the artillery barrage lifted at about 2200, Company C moved out from the creek bed in single file, one platoon behind the other. The moon had not yet come up and the hill was shrouded in darkness. A man could see barely ten yards ahead of him unless his eyes focused on outlined objects or figures. After climbing out of the creek bed, Company C advanced up the slope of Hill 109 with the M and 2d Platoons abreast, the 3d Platoon on the right. The two platoons were about 15 yards apart in a formation of two squads abreast and forward and one in support. The 1st Platoon, in reserve, followed the leading platoons at a connecting distance until it reached a point about 100 yards up the slope, where it dug in and waited for the go-ahead signal.

The Weapons Platoon followed the rifle platoons up the slope of Hill 109 about 50 yards from the creek bed and there emplaced its machine guns and mortars. Six .50-cal. machine guns of the 1st Battalion's Antitank Platoon set up in the creek bed to support Company C, and later moved to the draw at the foot of Hill 109, 25 yards beyond the creek. Because of intervening terraces, however, our machine guns could not bring effective fire on the German positions along the crest of Hill 109. Also, the close-in nature of the fighting for the hill made it difficult for mortars and machine guns to fire on the enemy without at the same time risking casualties among the riflemen of Company C. Therefore no supporting fire was used during the attack.

Once out of the creek bed, the leading platoons of Company C raced up the hill. Halfway up the slope, the two leading squads of the 3d Platoon on the right saw 15 to 20 men rush out of house No. 13, a few yards away. Thinking that the men were Germans, the 3d Platoon fired, wounding several of them. The rest hastened to identify themselves as troops of the 338th Infantry. These men explained that, after clearing out enemy resistance on the crest of 109 (they evidently mistook this knob for their objective, 131), they had returned halfway down the hill and dug in around the building to set up a rear-slope defense against counterattacks. At the time the 3d Platoon arrived, the men from the 338th Infantry had been in position for two hours. Communication failure prevented the 3d Platoon from knowing that friendly troops were on 109. During the course of this exchange of information, 1st Lt. Garvin C. McMakin, the company commander, came up and ordered the 3d Platoon and the 2d Platoon to dig in. But the 2d Platoon was not in contact.

On the left, the 2d Platoon of Company C had moved forward on the run until it reached the steepest part of the slope, and then changed to a fast walk. During the advance three machine guns fired from the crest of the ridge over the heads of the 2d Platoon, which was protected from fire by terraces that ringed the upper half of the slope.

One machine gun was in a dugout on the left in the saddle between Hills 109 and 131, the other two were on the crest of Hill 109. Between them they established interlocking bands of fire which covered the approaches to the crest. Coming up against a strand of concertina wire about 15-20 yards from the crest, Tech/Sgt. Joseph W. Adams, platoon sergeant, pulled his men back about 10 yards, deployed them in a skirmish line with the 3d Squad 5 yards to the right of the 2d squad, and directed them to dig in.

Before jumping off the 2d Platoon had been instructed by Lieutenant McMakin that, after reaching the crest, it would contact the 3d Platoon. Accordingly, when the 2d Platoon reached the concertina wire, the two scouts of the M Squad, Pfc. Phillips Soto and Pfc. Daniel B. Van Wickler, were sent over to the right to make contact with the M Platoon. They crawled over the ground for 50 yards until they found themselves under the very nose of the enemy machine gunners. Fortunately the two scouts were not detected. They searched for the 3d Platoon, but seeing no trace of it crawled back to the point where the rest of their platoon were digging in.

The Germans on the crest evidently heard the 2d Platoon digging in, because they threw flares at them and pulled an igniter which set off antipersonnel mines in the area. At the same time an enemy machine gun concealed in an earthen dugout covered with chicken wire began firing at them. Five men in the 2d Platoon were wounded or killed by the machine gun; three more fell victim to the mines. At that time the 3d Squad of the platoon was in support about 200 yards down the slope of Hill 109.

Soon after the machine gun opened fire and the mines went off, a runner from Lieutenant McMakin worked his way up to the terrace behind the 2d Platoon and called out for Sergeant Adams to pull his men down the slope abreast of the 3d Platoon. The 2d Platoon, minus the supporting squad which was below on the slope, then crawled down over the terrace. Protected from machinegun fire by this and the other terraces near the crest, the 2d Platoon walked halfway down the slope of Hill 109. After the 2d Platoon had withdrawn down the hill, Germans on the crest continued to pour searching machine-gun fire over the heads of the men and to throw flares to spot them.

When word reached Lieutenant McMakin of the casualties suffered by the 2d Platoon, he promptly called up the 1st Platoon which was still in its reserve positions. While waiting for it to arrive, 1st Lt. Donald S. Rocke, executive officer of Company C, decided that the weapon which had been firing from the crest of Hill 109 was an American light machine gun and that it was probably manned by elements of the 338th Infantry who did not know our troops were on the southeastern slope.

Contrary to advice from the other officers and from Sergeant Adams that the American-sounding machine gun was manned by Germans, Lieutenant Rocke went up the hill by himself to stop it from firing. He started off walking but, as he came closer to his objective, broke into a run. As he approached the machine gun he called out: "Identify yourself or we will throw the kitchen sink at you!" The Germans in the dugout allowed Lieutenant Rocke to get within ten yards before they opened fire and killed him.

Hearing the machine gun open up at Lieutenant Rocke and suspecting what had happened, Lieutenant McMakin led Company C forward from its position midway up the slope. In this attack two platoons were abreast and about 40 yards apart, with the 3d on the left and the 1st Platoon on the right. The 2d Platoon, which had suffered the heaviest casualties, had dropped back into reserve.

All the way up the hill rifle grenadiers of the 1st and 3d Platoons fired grenades at the German machine-gun positions. About 60 yards from the crest the riflemen also opened up, and the Germans replied with hand grenades and machine-gun fire. Unable to see their targets, the men of Company C directed area fire at the crest. Just before reaching the crest Lieutenant McMakin knocked out the machine gun on the right side of the crest. When Company C reached the top of Hill 109, the other machine guns ceased firing and between 0300 and 0400 the enemy withdrew down the northwest slope. Heavy artillery and mortar fire then began to fall on the crest. Outposting the tip of the hill with BAR men and one squad from each of the 1st and 3d Platoons, Lieutenant McMakin withdrew the remainder of the company down the southeastern slope, where they dug in and remained throughout the night.

Shortly before Company C jumped off, machine-gun fire began coming from Hill 131, objective of the 338th Infantry. After continuing to receive this fire, Major Brown decided that Germans still held the position and sent Company B up to silence the unexpected opposition. Before tackling the job, Capt. David R. Jones, commanding Company B, asked for a little more time so that he could get artillery fire placed on Hill 131. At about 0400, when it was still dark, Captain Jones led Company B up the northeast slope of Hill 131, two platoons abreast and in squad column. The right assault platoon went up the nose of the slope; the other platoon advanced 75 yards to the left. Though not used during Company B's advance up Hill 131, the mortars and machine guns were held ready in the draw on call. Shortly after the jump-off, Company B received some machine-gun fire, but it soon ceased. Apparently the Germans abandoned their positions on the crest, and with no more interference Company B marched straight up the hill. At the crest it struck a minefield which was surrounded by concertina wire and had been covered by a German machine gun. Although the mines killed or wounded several men, Company B's total casualties in the attack were comparatively small: five killed and seven wounded. At daybreak Company B moved back down to the creek bed, having been relieved by elements of the 338th Infantry.

Hills 131 and 109 were now securely in the hands of the 338th and 351st Infantry, but these points were the only objectives which had been taken during the costly 13 May attack. The 351st Infantry's carefully planned assault had been thrown off by several unforeseen circumstances: the slow approach of the 1st Battalion to its jump-off point; the delay in its commander's return from his reconnaissance which made postponement necessary; the failure of this information to get through in time to Companies E and G; and the enemy's heavy artillery barrage near Hill 103.

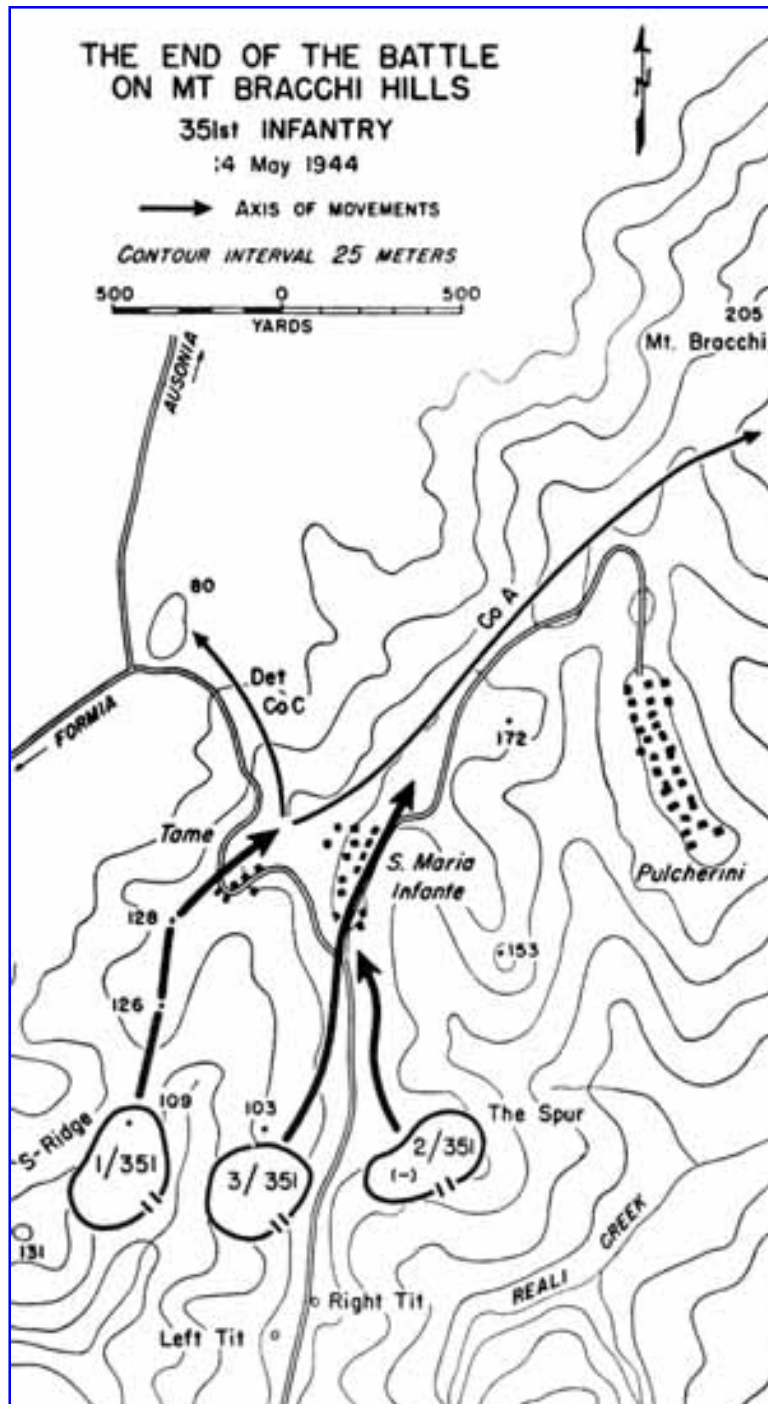
Capture of Santa Maria Infante (14 May)

Two and a half days of bitter fighting had apparently not yielded more than a few enemy strongpoints to the depleted battalions of the 351st Infantry. The 2d Battalion was still dug in on The Spur and the 3d had reorganized at the base of Hill 103. Both units were ready to renew the effort, and on Hill 109, its hard-won objective on the S-Ridge, the 1st Battalion prepared to push north again on 14 May ([Map No. 20](#)).

At 0800 the 3d Battalion attacked from Hill 103 toward Santa Maria along the west slope of the road, with Company I on the left and Company L on the right. Before entering the town, Company L was diverted to the right at the order of Major Furr to avoid the minefields on the left side of the road west of the Y-junction. Company I swung around and cleared out the houses in the western part of Santa Maria, where the enemy had posted a suicide group of snipers. Company L meanwhile crossed the road and cleared the houses on the right side of the town, killing and capturing a handful of riflemen.



SANTA MARIA INFANTE was entered on 14 May. The small hill town had been demolished by air and artillery bombardments.



MAP NO. 20

The two companies reached the town about 0900 and spent a couple of hours mopping up last pockets of enemy resistance. The 2d Battalion followed the 3d Battalion into Santa Maria; the enemy had also withdrawn from his excellent positions on The Spur.

Enemy defense weaker than the resistance of previous days, the northern half of S-Ridge was captured by the 1st Battalion. At 0800 Company A, commanded by Capt. John C. Reid, moved out of the creek bed below the S-Ridge and passed through Company C, which was on the southeast slope and

The 351st Infantry could be proud of its record in the three-day battle for Santa Maria Infante. The attack was the first offensive action undertaken by the regiments of the 88th Division, first American draft division to go into combat. Veteran units could not have shown a more aggressive spirit against the extremely difficult, well-placed enemy positions covering the -hills and approaches to the regimental objective. The 351st suffered over 500 casualties in the three days. On 12 and 13 May, the only days during the battle on which an accurate breakdown of losses can be made, 84 men were killed, 284 wounded, and 93 missing—a total of 461 casualties. On the morning of 14 May the effective strength of the 2d and 3d Battalions' rifle companies, each of which had started with 170 men, was as follows: Company E, 90; Company G, 86; Company I, 74; Company K, 68; and Company L, 118. Company F no longer existed.

The efforts of the 351st Infantry against some of the strongest positions in the II Corps sector contributed greatly to the success of the first phase of Fifth Army's drive to Rome. The constant pressure of the infantry attacks in the Bracchi triangle, and the threat to the enemy's lateral supply route by the 339th Infantry's capture (13 May) of San Martino Hill, which commanded the Spigno road junction, had prevented the enemy from shifting any troops to meet the French drive through the rugged country farther north. Holding Mt. dei Bracchi, II Corps guarded the Ausonia Valley from the south, helping the French to push swiftly across the valley on 14-15 May after their brilliant success in the Mt. Majo hills.

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